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"THE ENGLISH BOYS BOARDING PREPARATORY SCHOOL,  
1914 - 1940"

*Jonathan Edward Austin.*

*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.*

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"THE ENGLISH BOYS BOARDING PREPARATORY SCHOOL, 1918 - 1940"

*A Ph.D thesis submitted to the Open University by J.E.Austin,  
July 1995.*

This thesis is a detailed study of a long-standing English institution. The preparatory school is an integral component of the education system of Britain's wealthier classes and has influenced the lives of many of this country's greatest men. The popular conception of the inter-war prep school is that of an unpleasant world of bullies, beatings and cold baths. This notion stems from the writings of a few influential authors and may not represent the reality. This thesis seeks to examine this conception by comparing it with a detailed description of the institution drawn from a wide range of sources.

The study has utilised information from memoirs as well as interviews conducted with those who attended or taught at a prep school before the last war. Contemporary articles and reports have been supplemented by knowledge drawn from the schools own archives. One objective of the thesis has been to use these sources in their original form.

The prep school is defined and placed in its historical context. The nature of the popular conception is clarified before every aspect of prep school life in this period is then examined. The study considers the curriculum, games and staff. There is a detailed account of daily life. Rules, organisation and discipline are described and the ethos of the institution explored. Parents and relationships with son and school are also considered. Finally there is an attempt to identify the long term effect of the prep school experience.

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# 1: APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

## Introduction:

In the last thirty years the preparatory school<sup>1</sup> world has undergone a revolution. The typical prep school has changed from being a boys boarding prep school, located in a rural area and with around sixty boys, into a co-educational city day school numbering over 250 children. The prep school of thirty years ago is now a rare breed. This is a study of such schools in their heyday: the period between the two world wars.

## Aim of this Thesis:

The primary hypothesis of this thesis is that the popular conception of the inter-war prep school and the reality as experienced by the majority of boys are not always the same. The popular conception is overwhelmingly negative. It is an image of an institution which is powerful and enduring, so much so that prep schools today continue to suffer from its shadow. Peter Earle summarised the problem when he wrote "... the history of the schoolboy experience relies more than most history on anecdote and reminiscence in the absence of more immediate evidence. What is lacking in particular is the objective evidence of the outsider."<sup>2</sup> This thesis aims to examine the nature of the prep school experience by detailing life in these schools in the period between the two world wars.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter abbreviated to prep school.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Earle, "God, the Rod, and Lines from Virgil" in George Macdonald Fraser (Ed.), The World of the Public School (1977), p39.

It is hoped that by a comparison of a range of historical evidence we may be able to gain a closer grasp of the reality of life within this institution. A subsidiary hypothesis is that the institutions perception of itself may differ from individual experience of that same institution. Schools liked to project a particular image and claimed to offer a particular training: did the experience of the boys uphold these claims?

#### Justification for the Study:

The prep school is an integral component of the overall 'Public School System.' Almost all public school boys will have previously been at a prep school. There, in their young and formative years, many of Britain's greatest and most influential men would have had their beliefs and values instilled. Indeed, the effect of prep schooling on these children at a highly impressionable age is probably greater than that of the schools and universities which they may later have attended. In spite of this, we know little about the historical reality of prep school life other than the tales and anecdotes which help form the popular conception. This study will address this gap in our knowledge.

#### Sources:

The origin of the popular conception, examined later, is essentially contained in the writings of disaffected old boys. To explore the reality it was clearly necessary to draw upon a much wider range of sources. This range would include the

views of a variety of those who experienced these schools, both as boys and staff, the views of the institutions themselves and observations by outsiders.

Individual experiences have been drawn from several sources. These include biographies and autobiographies written many years after the event including several unpublished memoirs. A primary thrust has been to utilise oral history and around forty interviews were conducted with randomly selected old boys and staff. This has been supplemented by correspondence with numerous others. The contemporary views of individuals have been supplied by a range of surviving documentation such as letters home, diaries and school reports.

A key source of individual experiences has been the case studies which were conducted. Two schools of different types were selected. Sandroyd was chosen to represent an elite school<sup>3</sup> and The Downs, Colwall as a contrasting school with an alternative ethos. Databases of all boys who attended these schools were compiled and their addresses sought. All old boys for whom an address could be found<sup>4</sup> were then sent a simple confidential questionnaire along with an explanatory letter and a stamped, addressed envelope. Emphasis was placed on the fact that this was doctoral research rather than school promotion and thus negative and positive responses were encouraged. Questions asked included: why the school was

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3 Categories of prep school are examined on p52.

4 250 out of 600 who attended in the case of Sandroyd. 180 old boys were definitely dead so 250 represented 60% of all those who had attended. Similar figures are not available for The Downs as only an address list was supplied. 170 letters were mailed and it is fair to assume they represented approximately 50% of Old Downians from the period who were still alive.



chosen, the aspects enjoyed and not enjoyed and their overall level of enjoyment. The response rate to the Sandroyd survey was 65% - i.e. returns were received from around 30% of all boys who had attended the school in the period and nearly 50% of those who were still alive. The Downs survey was less successful with only about a 50% response rate.<sup>5</sup> The results were collated and the statistical data used in the thesis compiled.

In both surveys respondents were asked if they were prepared to answer further queries. A number were interviewed and several entered into correspondence. A sample of fifty Sandroyd Old Boys was selected to answer an additional, more detailed, questionnaire. The recipients were selected to represent the range of views of the school - e.g. as 27% of original respondents had indicated that they enjoyed their experience only "sometimes" 27% of recipients of the second questionnaire were from this group. Confidentiality was again stressed and a reply-paid envelope supplied.

This second questionnaire asked questions on issues such as bullying, enjoyment of specific sports and preparation for public school. The response rate was 98%. The returns provide valuable statistical data as well as a range of comparative memories which facilitate the composition of detailed pictures of the two schools.

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, however, that among the non-respondents may be those with no strong feelings either way or perhaps feelings too strong to note on paper. It may be that the respondents over represent those with definite feelings. Ultimately this problem is unsolvable and it may be wise to consider survey-derived data with this in mind.

The prep schools' own view of themselves comes from their contemporary literature. Thirty schools across the country were visited and their limited archives explored. These usually included school magazines and prospectuses and occasionally the writings of the headmaster and documents such as school rules and punishment books. Similar material was supplied by correspondents and located in record offices and libraries. Information from over 130 schools has been included. In addition use has been made of The Preparatory Schools Review and other contemporary books and periodicals.

Observations by outsiders are somewhat limited. The most important source is the reports of the Board of Education's inspectors. Other official reports and the occasional journal article have also provided some information.

One thrust of the study has been to investigate the possibility of a conflict between the institutional perception of itself (as detailed, for example, in contemporary sources) and the reality of that same institution as experienced by those who lived part of their lives in it. This will be explored by comparing what the schools say about themselves with the information supplied by individuals.

Given the large scope of the study - nationwide, spanning over twenty years and covering nearly a thousand schools and tens of thousands of old boys - it was not possible to devise a statistically correct sampling and information-gathering process. Instead the sources consulted were selected at random while ensuring that a fair geographical sample and differing

views and perspectives were included. While sources which historians traditionally rely on, such as official archives, barely exist,<sup>6</sup> almost every possible source of information and opinion has been explored.<sup>7</sup>

### Existing research and literature:

Existing academic research into prep school history is extremely limited. Most of it has been undertaken by Dr. Donald Leinster-Mackay of the University of Western Australia. In 1972 he completed his thesis on the 19th century development of the English private school.<sup>8</sup> From this he produced his seminal work on prep school history entitled The Rise of the English Prep School.<sup>9</sup> It concentrates on the Victorian period and the primary focus is on the institution itself and the Incorporated Association of Preparatory School (I.A.P.S.) rather than life within. Arthur Harrison's history of the I.A.P.S., How Was That, Sir?<sup>10</sup>, is in a similar vein. Leinster-Mackay has also published a range of articles relating to the early period of prep school history. A thesis by a schoolmaster written in 1938 was the first academic investigation into prep school

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6 There are a variety of reasons for this. Prep schools have rarely received attention from archivists; the schools own records are usually poor or non-existent and the prep school is not a type of school frequently discussed in the educational press.

7 Including school archives, private papers, libraries, every public record office in England, local history societies and museums, company files, books and periodicals, correspondence and oral sources.

8 D.P. Leinster-Mackay, "The English private school 1830 - 1914 with special reference to the private preparatory school", Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham, 1972.

9 Donald Leinster-Mackay, The Rise of the English Prep School (1984).

10 R.A. Harrison, How Was That, Sir? (1975).



history<sup>11</sup> but it is somewhat lightweight and, as with the works of Leinster-Mackay, does not focus on the reality of life within the institution, preferring to detail changes in curriculum and administration. The only other academic study of specific note is Judith Lee's investigation into private schools in Bognor Regis which includes outlines of the prep schools which existed in that area and some analysis of life within them.<sup>12</sup>

Surprisingly the integral role of the prep school is ignored in the numerous studies of public schools. Well-known works such as J.R.Honey's Tom Brown's Universe<sup>13</sup> or David Newsome's Godliness and Good Learning<sup>14</sup> make almost no mention of the public schools junior precursor nor, apart from a small piece relating the future careers of prep school masters, do they receive a mention in T.W.Bamford's The Rise of the Public Schools<sup>15</sup>. Although Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy has investigated the education of the British upper class at both younger than preparatory school age (The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny<sup>16</sup>) and at public school (The Public School Phenomenon<sup>17</sup>) neither study makes any significant mention of schooling between the ages of 8 and 13. Recent studies into

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11 Frank Pritchard, "The history and development of boys' preparatory schools in England", MA thesis, King's College, London, 1938.

12 Judith Lee, "The history and development of private schools in Bognor Regis"; Ph.D. thesis, University of Sussex, 1990.

13 J.R.deS.Honey; Tom Brown's Universe; Millington, London, 1977.

14 David Newsome; Godliness and Good Learning; John Murray, 1961.

15 T.W.Bamford, The Rise of the Public Schools (1967).

16 Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Rise and Fall of the British Nanny (1972).

17 Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, The Public School Phenomenon (1977).

manliness and mens social history have also overlooked the prep school, the one exception being Peter Lewis' contribution to Roper and Tosh's Manful Assertions.<sup>18</sup>

The biographers of famous figures have investigated their subjects prep school days but rarely cast much light on the nature of the institution. One systematic study is Robert Pearce's analysis of George Orwell's infamous prep school days<sup>19</sup> in which some justice is done to the reputation of St.Cyprian's.

Some prep school histories may fairly be represented as academic works. Simon Wright's Waterfield's School<sup>20</sup>, a study of the Victorian Temple Grove, is especially worthy and Mark Hichens' history of West Downs<sup>21</sup> and Nicholas Aldridge's of Summer Fields<sup>22</sup> are also relatively non-partisan and enlightening.

The only other works which provide some form of historical perspective are the two anthologies of prep school writing: Arthur Marshall's Whimpering in the Rhododendrons<sup>23</sup> and Martin

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18 Peter M. Lewis, "Mummy, Matron and the Maids" in Michael Roper and John Tosh (Eds.), Manful Assertions, Routledge, London, 1991. pp168-190.

19 Robert Pearce, "Truth and Falsehood: George Orwell's Prep School Woes" in RES New Series Vol.XLIII (1992); O.U.P., 1992.

20 Simon Wright, Waterfield's School; The Herons Ghyll Press, Uckfield, Sussex, 1994.

21 Mark Hichens, West Downs. A Portrait of an English Prep School; The Pentland Press, Durham, 1992.

22 Nicholas Aldridge, Time to Spare? A History of Summer Fields; David Talboys, Summer Fields, Oxford, 1989.

23 Arthur Marshall, Whimpering in the Rhododendrons, 1982.

Gilbert's Prep School<sup>24</sup>. However both these collections are superficial, comprising merely the more exciting aspects of various authors prep school experience and serving only to reinforce the popular mis-conception.

Beyond these works there exists a range of biographies and autobiographies, school histories, articles and published letters. There are some contemporary books about prep schools and life therein, the most notable being Frazer Hoyland's Aedificandum Est<sup>25</sup> and Kenneth Durlston's The Preparatory School System<sup>26</sup>. The full range of such publications is listed in the bibliography. All provide useful information but small pieces from each must be read before one is able to compile a complete picture.

This is the first detailed study of prep school life in any period.

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24 Martin Gilbert, Prep School. An Anthology; John Murray, 1991.

25 W.Frazer Hoyland, Aedificandum Est. An Account of Life at The Downs School, Colwall; privately printed, 1943.

26 Kenneth Durlston, The Preparatory School System; Robert Holden and Co., London, 1926.



## 2: THE POPULAR CONCEPTION

### The Nature of the Popular Conception:

*"Someone is whimpering in the rhododendrons .... This school is hidden in pine trees and rhododendrons. I wonder how many tears have been shed in these rhododendrons? Buckets and buckets I should think. I swear I'll never plant rhododendrons when I grow up."*<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

The decline in the number of boys boarding at prep school age is linked to the popular conception of what these schools are like. To people only familiar with State schools the term "boarding school" is synonymous with Dickens' Dotheboys Hall or the early Victorian Rugby of Tom Brown. Their feelings about boarding prep schools are unlikely to be complimentary: they probably consider them to be places of misery, filled with children abandoned to a coarse and Spartan world of cold baths, rough games, bullying, heartless staff and frequent corporal punishment; a place of archaic rules and customs; of physical deprivation, hardship and sorrow. This extract from the flyleaf of a recently published book succinctly summarises this view - the popular conception:

"For generations, little boys of eight or so have left home, apprehensively and for the first time, to brave the singular world of the prep school. There, since these schools began, erratic masters, fearsome matrons, icy dormitories and marshy sports fields have waited to transform them into decent, manly chaps, to fill them with character and pluck,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Luke, Sisyphus and Reilly (1972); p31.

### The Origin of the Popular Conception:

The origin of this conception is varied. There are people who actively campaign against the institution and who are happy to reinforce the stereotype. They may be disaffected old boys or may disagree with the values, practices and very presence of this type of school. A vocal group, they seek to present and re-present this negative image. This writers piece is typical:

"the quaint, farcical barbarity - the preparatory school. The persistence of this institution, despite brief fashionable flirtations by the British upper classes with the tediums of sexual normalcy and with that old chestnut about concern for the welfare of children, and despite the surprising failure of prisons and asylums to recruit even more clients from the many suitable cases for treatment who are entrusted with the plummier of the nation's trebles ..."<sup>3</sup>

Such writing strengthens a popular conception which draws its ideas from several sources. Principal among these is what has been written in works of fiction or autobiography. George Orwell said of his prep school that:

"for years I loathed its very name so deeply that I could not view it with enough detachment to see the significance of the things that happened to me there."<sup>4</sup>

From their retrospective position popular writers such as Orwell write with a vehemence and passion about their unhappy

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Gilbert, Prep School (1991).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hislop, "Lessons for Life". A review of Arthur Marshall, Whimpering in the Rhododendrons (1984) in The Times Literary Supplement (1984), p1246.

<sup>4</sup> Orwell, "Such, Such Were The Joys" in Orwell and Angus (Eds.) The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Vol.IV In Front of Your Nose 1945 - 1950 (1968). As Eric Blair Orwell attended St.Cyprian's, Eastbourne.

memories of boyhood. Theirs is an influential view. Winston Churchill wrote:

"How I hated this school, and what a life of anxiety I lived there for more than two years. I made very little progress at my lessons, and none at all at games. I counted the days and the hours to the end of every term, when I should return home from this hateful servitude."<sup>5</sup>

To understand the detail of the conception one must investigate what writers such as Orwell and Churchill go on to write. Cyril Connolly expounded:

"The new school my parents chose for me was on the coast. At first I was miserable there and cried night after night. My mother cried at sending me and I have often wondered if that incubator of persecution mania, the English private school, is worth the money that is spent on it or the tears its pupils shed. At an early age small boys are subjected to brutal partings and long separations which undermine their love for their parents before the natural period of conflict and are encouraged to look down on them without knowing why. To owners of private schools they are a business like any other, to masters a refuge for incompetence, in fact a private school has all the faults of a public school without any of its compensations, without tradition, freedom, historical beauty, good teaching or communication between pupil and teacher. It is one of the few tortures confined to the ruling classes and from which the workers are still free. I have never met anybody yet who could say he had been happy there."<sup>6</sup>

The popular conception is clearly a negative one and one which comprises several parts.

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<sup>5</sup> Winston Churchill, My Early Life, quoted in Randolph Churchill's biography Vol.1, p48. Winston attended St.George's, Ascot.

<sup>6</sup> Cyril Connolly (St.Cyprian's), Enemies of Promise (1938), p159.



### The Components of the Conception:

It is important at this stage to note that the conception does not always differentiate a great deal between public school and prep school and is more one of "the system" which these two types of school represent. However, those with more than a superficial knowledge can usually identify aspects which they consider unique to the prep school. Their ideas come from various writers and, by analyzing a broad range of these, the source of the conception may be identified.

Most begin by describing their initial experiences. Some authors consider the moment of separation from parents and removal from home as the most distressing time of their life. Arthur Marshall wrote that "to have been removed from home at the age of nine and placed in cheerless and outstandingly unsybaritic surroundings was a traumatic experience that will be with me to the grave and beyond." Furthermore, when it is written that:

"Your home might be far from perfect, but at least it was a place ruled by love rather than fear, where you did not have to be perpetually on your guard against the people surrounding you. At eight years old you were suddenly taken out of this warm nest and flung into a world of force and fraud and secrecy, like a gold-fish into a tank full of pike."<sup>7</sup>

one forms the opinion that sending a child to board, particularly at this young age, was not merely unkind but cruel. This alone is sufficient to generate opposition to the boarding prep school but the concept goes beyond this to

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<sup>7</sup> Orwell, Op.Cit., p349.

include an idea of what life was like once one had arrived at school.

For boys going to his school, the Hon. Terence Prittie wrote:

"There was little chance of them being happy at Cheam. We were arriving towards the end of September, and already a dank gloom hung over the place. It was draughty and bitterly cold, later on. Dormitories were cramped and inhospitable; my only comfort was the coloured blanket I had brought with me .... The lack of heating meant that three boys out of four suffered from chilblains in the winter. Coughs and colds were rampant."<sup>8</sup>

Others painted an equally depressing and unpleasant picture:

"Grey was the colour of those early years at school. Rows of 'toonels' [boys] clad in grey shorts, warming themselves on the hot water pipes; grey jerseys, grey caps and a grey fluid, purporting to be cocoa, served in enamel mugs before bed-time; grey porridge for breakfast, grey bread and margarine for tea."<sup>9</sup>

"It is not easy for me to think of my schooldays without seeming to breathe in a whiff of something cold and evil-smelling - a sort of compound of sweaty stockings, dirty towels, faecal smells blowing along corridors, forks with old food between the prongs, neck-of-mutton stews, and the banging doors of the lavatories and the echoing chamber pots in the dormitories."<sup>10</sup>

We gain the impression that the boarding prep school was somehow primitive and Spartan; that the boys were poorly treated and ill-cared for, that daily existence was one of hardship and suffering. Dormitories were devoid of decoration, large and cold, with wooden floors and iron bedsteads. Classrooms, battered and bare, were simply furnished with decrepit desks and piles of tatty, ancient books - all clad in

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<sup>8</sup> Terence Prittie, Through Irish Eyes (1977); p36.

<sup>9</sup> Hallam Tennyson, The Haunted Mind (1984); p29.

<sup>10</sup> Orwell; Op.Cit.; p348.

chalk-dust. Food was of a uniquely unpalatable and unsavoury nature. Furthermore, the reader is told that within these sparse and uncomfortable surroundings daily life was equally fraught:

"Looking back on my four years at Cheam I am still afflicted by a feeling of nightmare.

There was a terrifying amount of bullying. The most usual forms were 'kneeing' at the base of the spine, the pulling of the short hairs above the ears, and arm twisting ....

There was also organised beating of the smaller boys by backward louts of thirteen, carried out partly from sheer sadism and partly to see how plucky a child might be."<sup>11</sup>

Orwell described a world where "Life was hierarchical and whatever happened was right. There were the strong, who deserved to win and always did win, and there were the weak, who deserved to lose and always did lose, everlastingly."<sup>12</sup>

According to the popular conception concurrent with the bullying and lawlessness among the boys there was a multitude of official rules and regulations which all were expected to obey. These were often trivial, unreasonable or overly rigid: silence in corridors, standing to attention, strict punctuality and obedience. The school rules and customs were rigorously and ruthlessly enforced by a strict system of discipline and organisational hierarchy. School staff were meticulously and savagely stern. Punishment was frequent and brutal. An adherence to, and enforcement of, strict discipline - particularly that maintained by the frequent application of the cane - was, according to the legend, a fundamental and pre-eminent feature. In reinforcing this

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<sup>11</sup> Prittie (1977), p38.

<sup>12</sup> Orwell; Op.Cit.; p359.



belief various writers are happy to oblige:

"Brockhurst was run as if it were a penal institution. R.P. would flog both privately and publicly with an abandon that today would have brought him before the courts."<sup>13</sup>

"The school motto was 'Quit you like men: be strong', and exhortation not without relevance to some of us boys. He [the Headmaster] beat me on a number of occasions, often for some trivial offence. Sent up early to the dormitory, I had to kneel naked by the side of my bed. I remember crying out the first time, "It hurts!" and Lang [the Headmaster] saying grimly, "It's meant to."<sup>14</sup>

Where such writers describe the staff at their prep school they are rarely complimentary. The popular conception is of inept and incompetent men who prove the old axiom 'those that can, do, those that can't teach.' In Evelyn Waugh's novel Decline and Fall the principal character, Paul Pennyfeather, is sent down from Oxford to teach at a school typified only by shabby incompetence. Pennyfeather himself is little different and has no qualification or flair for teaching.<sup>15</sup> At his prep school in the early 1900s, Kenneth Clark states that:

"The small boys were conscious that their masters were lazy and incompetent, but nobody could explain to us that these poor freaks had been driven into their profession by necessity, crypto-homosexuality or some other misfortune ..."<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive description of what a prep school master was perceived to be is provided by this extract from The Sunday Correspondent during the brief period of its

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13 Julian Critchley M.P. - letters to The Brock and extracts from "Boy on the School Bench" in The Listener, 12/1979. Quoted in J.T.Fleming, A Century off the Examiner (1984), p46.

14 Wilfrid Thesiger (St.Aubyns) The Life of My Choice (1987), p67.

15 Waugh describes the pupils at Llanabba Castle as being aged 10 - 18 but the activities and nature of the school mark it as a preparatory school and most commentators have labelled it thus. The tale is, to an extent, autobiographical for Waugh himself taught, ineptly, at a prep school (Arnold House, Llandullas) for want of something better to do.

16 Kenneth Clark, Another Part of the Wood (1974), p35.

existence:

**Salary:** £35 a week plus accommodation (use of third XV changing block, a sulphurous Nissen hut next to genetic engineering lab, boarding with mad crone in nearby village. Four months unpaid holiday.

**Perks:** Food (whale meat, tapioca etc.); access to assistant matrons, confiscated bubble-gum, chalk, ink; use of staff-room wireless (Radio 2).

**Qualifications:** 50 years as tea planter (Trincomalee), fluent liar and strict disciplinarian, skin cancer, malarial shake, poorly-fitting glass eye.

**Alternative Qualifications:** 45 years Army service (ideally culminating in rank of major) followed by 10 years commission in Tanganyikan Native Police. Must personally have carried out the death penalty during this period. Firmness but fairness essential. Brick complexion. Poorly-fitting wooden leg.

**Duties:** Hand out class notes about Jute, manioc root, Nyasaland, tapioca etc. Reminisce about Johnny Africa. Tell not-quite-understood jokes about the khazi, use of left hand and circumcision. Supervise games (rugger, footer, hunt the tapioca etc.). Supervise PT lessons (Climbing the Rope, Vaulting the Horse, Wrestling with Sir on the Mat while Oiled, Climbing the Rope again). Closely supervise and monitor showers. Whip pupils with small knotted thong attached to whistle. Monitor extra rope-climbing and showers.

**Wife:** Either, anaemic, marvellous little woman, papery complexion, jigger-worms in leg, problem with Tio Pepe. Or, sorry, old boy, confirmed bachelor.

**Clobber:** Leather patches on leather patches at elbow of cavalry-twill jacket. Thornproof cords. Frayed Nyasaland Native Infantry or Old Rugbeian tie (purloined from local golf club changing rooms). Heavy desert boots (or boot, in the case of a monopod).

**In pockets:** Early Ronson lighter in soft felt pouch, small foul pipe, shag, copies of Scouting for Boys, Boys and Fitness, Boys and Efficiency, plus sweets for rewarding boys for fitness, efficiency, rope-climbing, showers, tapioca.<sup>17</sup>

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17 From The Sunday Correspondent Magazine (1989), pp33-34. This is clearly a historical piece rather than one portraying a 1989 preparatory school.



Towering above all staff was reputed to be the headmaster. Tradition dictates that he should have been an Oxbridge blue at some major sport with his degree almost certainly in Classics. Often old and severe, he ruled his school with a rod of iron, striking fear into boys, assistant staff and parents alike. A passion for corporal punishment was *de rigueur*. Robert Hartman describes the headmaster of his school as "a man of ungovernable temper, a sadist, and a person who was thoroughly unsuited to be in charge of small boys."<sup>18</sup>

In lessons boys are supposed to have learnt nothing but Classics - deemed to be irrelevant and out-dated. Many pointless and boring hours were spent translating and writing in a language no-one needed and no-one spoke:

"Traditionally, the English gentleman was taught to compose verses in Latin and Greek.

As this is an accomplishment beyond the capacity of any but a special few with a peculiar gift in this direction, the English gentleman was effectively taught nothing at all - except perhaps the profane values of classical authors and the lewd example of their amoral gods."<sup>19</sup>

Legend maintains that academic activities were only of secondary importance - the primary aim of the institution was to produce solid and dependable Empire builders. Kenneth Clark wrote: "A few of these preparatory schools may have been interested in educating their pupils, but Wixenford, the school to which I was sent, had no such pretensions."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Hartman (St.Asaph's), The Remainder Biscuit (1964); p43.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Soames and Duncan Steen, The Essential Englishman (Cassell, 1989), p21.

<sup>20</sup> Clark (1974); p33.

If life inside the classroom was dominated by the Classics then life outside it was dominated by games. It is customary to consider games the overriding preoccupation in the prep school. This involved savage encounters on muddy rugger pitches or interminable games of cricket with all the spectators scoring. Christopher Pirie-Gordon claimed that "Rugger, with Soccer and holy Cricket, formed the trinity of the school's established religion."<sup>21</sup>

This, then, is the popular conception which this thesis seeks to examine. However before any analysis of life within the prep school it is necessary to determine exactly what sort of schools they were, why they were like this and how they have developed.

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21 Pirie-Gordon in his contribution to The Early Years of St. Peter's. Quoted in Gilbert; p64.

### 3: THE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

#### Defining the Prep School:

The title accorded to these schools is a description of their very nature. They are 'preparatory' for the public schools and exist to prepare boys to proceed on to this type of senior school. They therefore form the lower part of a system of education: the Public School System. All prep schools in the period shared several features:

1. They were fee-paying.
2. They were privately owned and received no state assistance.
3. Boys left before the age of 15 and went on to an independent secondary school.
4. The majority were boarding schools.
5. Co-education was very rare: the schools were generally only for boys.

#### Why Prep School was necessary:

It was extremely rare for any boy to go directly to public school without having first attended a prep school. In the case of major public schools it was effectively impossible. There were two main reasons for this.

Firstly, after the advent of Common Entrance and an entry policy which was, nominally at least, competitive, an academic standard was required which only the prep school or an expensive tutor could deliver. This was particularly because



of the high standard required in classics, a subject barely taught in state schools. The high expectations, smaller classes and heavier workload of the prep school gave its products a distinct advantage.

Secondly, the prep school was a vital social precursor. The world of the boarding school was very different from that of home and the English public school even more so. The Headmaster of Harrow, Cyril Norwood, said that boys arrived at his school "after being well broken in at their preparatory schools, where all has been ordered in imitation of the bigger school to come. They know what is expected of them."<sup>1</sup> A prep school headmaster wrote: "Within its walls boys learn to bear the separation from home and find their feet with other boys of the same age and older."<sup>2</sup> In her study of Ellesmere College Christine Heward noted that "Boys who had no parents or prep school experience of the powerful forces of socialisation in such institutions, arrived at the school without friends, survival techniques or models of manliness to follow."<sup>3</sup> Without the training of the prep school integration and survival at public school would have been even more difficult although, as detailed later, prep school was not always enough.

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<sup>1</sup> Cyril Norwood; "The Boy's Boarding School" in Dover Wilson (1928), p124.

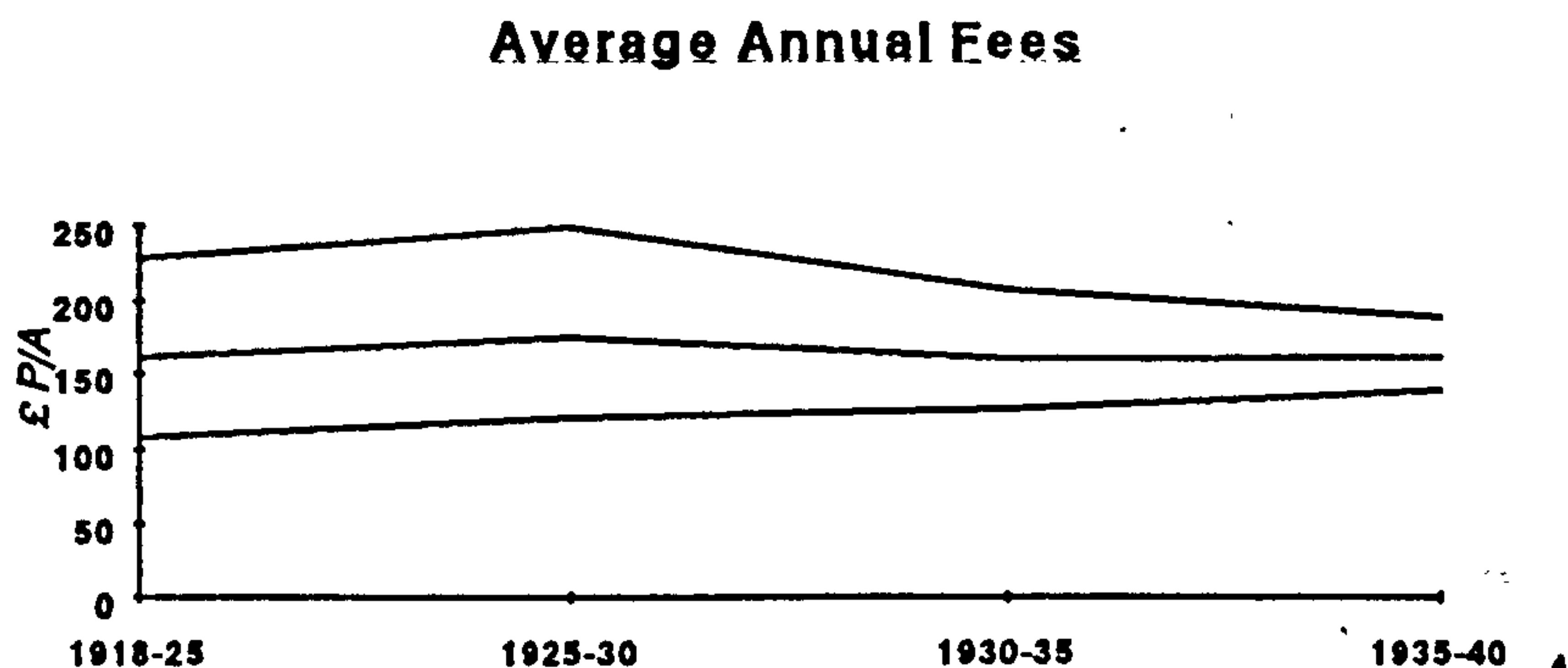
<sup>2</sup> Alan Rannie (Headmaster of West Hayes); "The Preparatory School" in Dover Wilson, (1928), p74.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Heward, Making a Man of Him (1988), p126.



## Fees and Finances:

As prep schools were, with a few exceptions, privately owned, and without endowment funds, all income was derived from fees charged. Only those on a better than moderately high income could afford such costs and this is examined later. As the graph below indicates, the fees charged varied widely.



The chart also shows that the average fee changed little in the period. Inflationary pressure was minimal and the cost of living remained constant or even declined through the 1918 - 40 period<sup>5</sup>. Many headmasters were philosophically opposed to the idea of making a significant profit from their enterprise.

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<sup>4</sup> These fees are for a 12 year old and include all compulsory extras (i.e. laundry, doctors fee etc.). The sample size varies between 15 and 8 per five year grouping and is for inspected schools. Source: Board of Education Inspection Reports, PRO Kew ED109.

<sup>5</sup> Halsey's research into the cost of living for a manual worker in the period uses a cost base of 1930 = 100. In 1918 the cost of living = 130.1 and in 1933 = 89.2. Not until 1939 did it return to 1930 levels.

While the proprietors of Moffats were determined not to go under they were "positively obsessed with the idea that we should not make a profit."<sup>6</sup> After the war one wrote: "Financially, the school has never been profitable, but then it was never intended to be."<sup>7</sup> An old boy wrote "I think the profit motive was very low in priorities. He [the Headmaster] was no business man."<sup>8</sup> Many oral sources connected to headmasters of the period mentioned their reluctance to increase fees, feeling that the "parents wouldn't take it"<sup>9</sup> or concerned that they "must give value for money."<sup>10</sup> When Sandroyd increased its fees the Headmaster sent an apologetic letter to parents:

"It is an enormous sum to shell out for a small boy's education: at the same time it is not profiteering; at least I don't think you can call it profiteering if you get no profits .... I enjoy the most interesting life and so I don't worry about absence of profits at the moment."<sup>11</sup>

One headmaster who deliberately set his fees at a low level "had to enlighten one or two parents who asked 'There must be a snag in this: do you feed the boys properly?'"<sup>12</sup> A contemporary writer stated that prep schools were not schools

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<sup>6</sup> Mr.J.E.Engleheart, interview 6/1994.

<sup>7</sup> R.J.Mowll (Great Walstead) in Great Walstead Magazine, 1963, p2.

<sup>8</sup> Mr.Richard Garne (Upton), letter 3/1993.

<sup>9</sup> Mrs.E.Keyte (Beaudesert Park).

<sup>10</sup> Mrs.S.Belle (Aldeburgh Lodge).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from W.M.Hornby to Mr.Burn dd.4/5/1922. Personal papers of M.C.Burn.

<sup>12</sup> John Crook; A History of The Pilgrims' School (1981), p43.

run for private profit but "in reality they are schools run at great private risk for immense public profit."<sup>13</sup>

Analysis of this issue has led to mixed results. While many prep schools may have provided a very small income (some, in fact, went bankrupt) it seems that most generated a comfortable and occasionally spectacular supply of revenue for their owner (invariably the headmaster(s)). The following data is taken from sales particulars in the Gabbittas and Thring archives:

Price:	Receipts:	Profit:
£20000	£ 7300	£2943
£ 7800	£ 4000	£ 600
£ 6500	£ 2700	£ 500
£12000	£ 6000	£1000
£ 9500	£ 3998	£ 700
£10000	£ 6000	£ 700
£30000	£18200	£2700

Such particulars probably give an inflated figure for profitability and they do not give details of where money has been spent before profit was calculated - what, for example, had been spent on buildings and maintenance? A more useful

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<sup>13</sup> King (1924), p254.

<sup>14</sup> The price was that to be paid by an incoming headmaster. The archives do not reveal the name of the school or information as to the number of pupils.



insight is provided by excerpts from the termly accounts for two prep schools: Sandroyd and Temple Grove:<sup>15</sup>

School:	Income:	Profit: <sup>16</sup>
Sandroyd 1921	£6697	£1973
Sandroyd 1926	£9484	£1164
T.G. 1925	£4536	£ 896
T.G. 1926	£4826	£1524

These schools seemed to provide both a good return on investment. Only rarely was profit directed toward capital investment, it simply seemed to provide a generous income for their owners. However both were established schools charging high fees and the situation in other, less famous, schools was undoubtedly different. Headmasters planning to hand their school onto their son had to make some provision for retirement. It seems fair to conclude that most headmasters did not set out to make a personal fortune from their schools but equally most were able to live a comfortable life existing on the proceeds.

Additional evidence for the beneficence of some headmasters is that, despite the fact that they were running a business rather than a charity, most gave some form of bursaries or scholarships. Occasionally, as in the case of George Orwell and David Ogilvy at St.Cyprian's, this was partly linked to

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<sup>15</sup> Only a few schools still possess their accounts from this period. Sandroyd data is taken from the accounts books in the school archives. The Temple Grove figures come from a private note book in the possession of Mr.Simon Wright.

<sup>16</sup> After deduction of the cost of provisions, salaries and wages, fuel and light, repairs and renewals, laundry and general expenses.



self-interest: "St.Cyprian's was too expensive for my father to afford, but the Headmaster and his wife were aware that he had won a First in the classical tripos at Cambridge, and were prepared to bet on my winning similar academic honours. This would redound to their credit and thus boost their enrolment; so they took me at half their usual fee".<sup>17</sup> More often it was in response to real need. One retired headmaster said "One did not expect parents to ask for a reduction but one would give one if you saw the need."<sup>18</sup> Widows were frequent beneficiaries. One old boy remembered the headmaster had written to his mother when he was born offering him a free place as his deceased father had been such a great Old Boy.<sup>19</sup> The Elms took the sons of soldiers and parsons at reduced fees<sup>20</sup> as did many other schools. Analysis of the Sandroyd accounts shows that between £562 and £203 per term was forgone in reduced fees - the equivalent of 2 - 8 free places and nearly 10% of income.<sup>21</sup> The situation at St.Andrew's, Eastbourne, in 1913 was similar: 82 boys paid the basic fee of £35 while 11 paid less, with a total reduction equivalent to 4 free places.<sup>22</sup> Such reductions were not advertised but available on application. A prior connection with the school was a definite advantage.

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<sup>17</sup> David Ogilvy, Blood, Brains and Beer (1978), p7.

<sup>18</sup> G.C.N.Grundy (Feltonfleet/Perrott Hill).

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Matthews (Sandroyd); Mainly on the Bright Side (1989); p34.

<sup>20</sup> Col.G.M.Singleton, interview 10/1991.

<sup>21</sup> Sandroyd accounts books in school archives.

<sup>22</sup> Fees book lent to Mr.Simon Wright by Mr.David Mockler.

In addition to the 'basic' fee most schools added a long list of 'extras.' At St.Andrew's this included 'compulsory extras' such as laundry, games and library subscriptions which made the average basic fee in 1913 rise from the £35 charged for 'tuition and board' to around £52. Some bills were as high as £89. Extras were added to the Sandroyd parents' bill too: the basic fee of around £68 per term in 1929 increased to an average of £78 by the time extras such as carpentry, insurance, boxing and even extra cream had been included.

The Sandroyd accounts show that bills were not always paid on time and sometimes not at all. In the period 1928 - 1940 an average of £198 per term was owed in arrears. Occasionally when these reached a level equivalent to two terms' fees the boy's name ceases to be recorded in the ledger. The expenditure column also notes 'legal expenses', some of which were, presumably, incurred in the collection of outstanding debts. Parents funded school fees out of income and investment funds. Occasionally relatives helped. One mother even sold her jewellery to pay the fees.<sup>23</sup>

Ownership of a school by the headmaster inevitably caused some level of conflict between what things cost and what was best for the school. While most headmasters maintained that they did not seek to make profits a pressure to contain costs must have existed. This might be apparent in a reluctance to purchase new books or school furniture and was often a

problem when it came to expensive building improvements. When Brockhurst built a new swimming pool the magazine noted "though the Headmaster is quite prepared to have to foot the bill for the benefit of the boys, yet he would indeed be grateful for any further assistance towards this end."<sup>24</sup> Headmasterial pride in new classrooms, dormitories and bathrooms was no doubt heightened by the fact that he had paid for it all. Appeals and fund-raising were problematic for it was difficult to separate donations to the school from donations to the headmaster. Some schools, such as Pinewood, established separate school funds to which parents, old boys and friends could contribute for the betterment of the school. Wealthy and grateful parents occasionally paid for new facilities when their youngest son left.

A very small number of prep schools were not owned by the headmaster. This type fell into three categories:

- 1/ Schools where the Headmaster was employed by the owner. One example was Port Regis in Broadstairs which was owned by an eminent doctor.
- 2/ Charitable trusts or limited companies. Chafyn Grove in Salisbury was one of the first trusts. Abinger Hill, the avant-garde prep school in Surrey, was established by an educational trust. The Wells House was a limited company until financial difficulties in 1935 led to its purchase by the Headmaster.
- 3/ Public school junior schools. It was an increasing trend for minor public schools to open their own preparatory

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24 The Brock, Summer 1924, p7.



departments. Sometimes these were located on the premises and fed exclusively to the senior school whereas on other occasions they were semi-independent schools where boys sat Common Entrance. Monkton Combe Junior School and Smallwood Manor (Denstone College Junior School) are examples of the latter.

Contemporary writers were divided about the benefits of these different types of prep school. One commentator considered private preps better because the headmaster had a personal interest, and would suffer if the school failed, and was independent of higher authority. On the other hand 'public' preps had an advantage for there was no conflict with self-interest, the headmaster was there by merit rather than wealth and the staff were more likely to be paid a decent salary.<sup>25</sup> Prep school heads in the I.A.P.S. were constantly asserting the value of their independence and some saw this as the greatest strength of their schools. The difficulties which such a financial position sometimes involved are evident in this extract from a special confidential report by Board of Education inspectors:

"When Mr.Deuchar took in Mr.Hope as a partner in 1933, he understood that Mr.Hope would bring the Heddon Court connection with him. But he brought just a handful of the actually surviving Heddon Court boys, and no others followed. It is pretty obvious that there was serious consequential friction, especially as Mr.Deuchar's own long connection had begun rapidly to fade away. Moreover Mr.Hope's interest seems to have been teaching Mathematics to clever boys; he neglected all the others and his subject fell into a bad way.

Last year, Mr.Hope cut the painter and retired. In the meantime numbers were rapidly dwindling.

Mr.Deuchar then looked round for another junior partner and eventually fixed things up with Mr.Lee, a youngish and vigorous man who has been desperately trying to tap a new source of boy-supply, but so far without success. Mr.Deuchar himself, a parson, is definitely giving up this July, and hopes to get a living ... he probably feels that the ship is sinking. Mr.Lee is now looking around, in his turn, for a partner, one who can bring some boys ..."<sup>26</sup>

### Boarding:

The historical tendency of the English upper classes to send their sons away to school has been well detailed. As the senior part of the system of which the prep school formed a part was almost exclusively made up of boarding schools it was logical that the junior school should also be a residential one. Its function as a social preparation made boarding an important component of the training it offered. Evelyn Waugh, who attended a day prep school, wrote that a day school "does little to equip a child for the endurance of adolescence at his public school"<sup>27</sup> and "Had I been earlier inured to the violence and hardship of school life, I might have been less forlorn when I met them at the age of thirteen."<sup>28</sup>

The totality of boarding school life provided the perfect environment for the inculcation of the values for which public

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<sup>26</sup> Board of Education Special Confidential Report of Horton School, Ickwell Bury, Beds. 4/6/1937. PRO Kew ED109/41. The school closed in 1938.

<sup>27</sup> Waugh (1964), p86.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

schools stood. Public and prep schools offered more than merely an academic education - this was almost secondary to the values they attempted to instil. One headmaster wrote "In one sense the life of a preparatory boarding school begins when the classroom is left behind."<sup>29</sup> Another said "A school isn't just a place for lessons and this is what distinguishes a boarding school from even the best of day schools."<sup>30</sup> One source commented "children learn so much more from each other"<sup>31</sup> and "so much was done at the weekend."<sup>32</sup> The boarding school was considered to encourage such characteristics as self-reliance, self-protection, responsibility, competitiveness, manners, tolerance, unselfishness together with a love and appreciation of home. Christine Heward noted, "Education at a boarding school meant complete control and supervision of a boy's life and of the influences upon him. It was a much more effective instrument of intellectual attainment and character moulding than a day school .... habits of order and discipline were instilled through an all-embracing daily routine."<sup>33</sup> An old boy noted "It forces boys to develop their characters in a way an ordinary day-school does not and cannot."<sup>34</sup> The full nature of the prep school ethos is explored in a later chapter.

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<sup>29</sup> Alan Rannie (West Hayes); "The Preparatory School" in J.Dover Wilson (Ed.); The Schools of England (1928), p74.

<sup>30</sup> J.E.Engleheart (Moffats), interview 6/1994.

<sup>31</sup> Mr.J.R.Thompson (Marlborough House), interview 10/1993.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Christine Heward, Making a Man of Him (1988), p51.

<sup>34</sup> John Spencer Churchill, Crowded Canvas. Quoted in Nicholas Aldridge, Time to Spare? (1989), p88.



Boarding at prep school age was the accepted and common practice amongst those able to afford it. Parents would send their sons away to board because that was what they themselves had done and that was what their friends and acquaintances were doing. As one headmaster's wife said: "There was no question of anything else -we never thought about it."<sup>35</sup> One old boy said: "It was taken for granted that I was going to go away to school."<sup>36</sup> and another that "It was absolutely the accepted thing among my social group and you would have been thought 'odd' if you'd been kept at home."<sup>37</sup> Other sources stated firmly: "We thought that a real school was a boarding school."<sup>38</sup> and "People of our sort always went to boarding school."<sup>39</sup> Day-children did not have quite the same status as full-boarders. In Frank Richards's tales day-boys are tolerated but somehow regarded as not quite 'pukka'. The Headmaster of Harrow warned that a day-boy might be labelled a "rank outsider".<sup>40</sup> Schools taking day-boys were looked down on; for example, it was not until 1947 that the headmaster of a day school became chairman of the I.A.P.S. Entries for schools for sale in the Gabbittas and Thring<sup>41</sup> archives note proudly that the school had 'no day-boys'.

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35 Mrs.E.Keyte (Beauesert Park), interview 11/1991.

36 Mr.Henry Glaisyer, interview 8/1993.

37 Sandroyd survey respondent no.42.

38 J.E.Engleheart (Moffats), interview 6/1994.

39 Mrs.Sylvia Belle, interview 12/1992.

40 H.A.Vachell, Distant Fields, London, 1937, p31. Quoted in Jeffrey Richards, Happiest Days (1988), p201.

41 The educational consultants Gabbittas and Thring, as well as their competitors Truman and Knightley, were closely involved in the preparatory school world. One service offered was the sale and transfer of schools.

In many cases boarding was a necessity. These were the days when Britain had an empire which required thousands of men to police, defend and administer it. The Pinewood magazine noted "More than one quarter of the boys in the School have at least one parent (and in most cases both) absent abroad in India, Burmah, Africa, China, S.America or the West Indies. This is exclusive of parents in Italy, Switzerland etc."<sup>42</sup> Local conditions and schooling were often unsatisfactory. In many parts of the Empire it was said that "educational facilities are practically non-existent for the European child, and the climate unsuitable for the growing child."<sup>43</sup> Even within Britain transport was neither as easy or as swift as it is in the late twentieth century and in many cases it was only by going away to school that a decent education could be obtained - even more so when there was no local day prep school. Of course there was also a snob element in this: one retired headmaster noted the feeling that "the local schools were for the local people."<sup>44</sup> An old boy said going to a council school was "out of the question for a middle class boy."<sup>45</sup>

Various other factors also supported the boarding school concept. Parents working in London and other large cities were concerned that their children should escape the hazards and pollution therein. A doctor writing in the British Medical Journal stated: "Boarding school is essential for solitary

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<sup>42</sup> The Blue and Grey (Pinewood), Spring 1932, p3.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Pritchard, "The history and development of boys' preparatory schools in England"; MA thesis, King's College, London (1938), p79.

<sup>44</sup> Revd.P.M.Chadwick, interview 9/1992.

<sup>45</sup> Mr.R.Garne, letter 3/1993.



children, children of widows, and delicate town children. It is impossible to exaggerate the benefit that may accrue to the latter from years spent in the wonderful air of our health resorts."<sup>46</sup> One boy whose mother became a widow wrote "As my father died when I was 5 years old my mother hoped that the Masters would give me the guidance I missed from him and she felt that if I stayed at home she would 'spoil' me."<sup>47</sup> Another old boy noted "The idea of sending me to boarding school was undoubtedly meant to make up for my being an only child."<sup>48</sup> A few were orphans.<sup>49</sup> A headmaster emphasised how well leisure time was used, the convenience of not having to travel daily to school and the freedom from responsibility it gave to parents.<sup>50</sup> Sadly there were cases where children were sent off to school simply so that parents could be rid of them for twelve weeks at a time but it should be emphasised that this was true of only a small minority. There were also occasions when children had a violent or unhappy home or a home where they were neglected.

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<sup>46</sup> Reginald Miller, "Some Medical Aspects of Boarding School Life" in British Medical Journal, 20/5/1933, pp863-6.

<sup>47</sup> Mr.C.Boldero, letter 2/1993.

<sup>48</sup> Gerald Priestland, Something Understood (1986), p28.

<sup>49</sup> The Charney Hall Notes record a Donald Ireland Deakin whose "mother had died before ever he came to us, and his father died suddenly when Don had only been a short while at Charney Hall; and thenceforth it always seemed to us that Don lavished upon us and upon Charney Hall a strength of affection more than most boys are able to give to their School, an affection which would normally have been bestowed upon father and mother .... few boys have felt quite so sad at leaving Charney Hall, few have remained so loyal and so full of remembrance of their little Preparatory School in after years. He never failed to write to us once or twice a year from India, and never failed to come and see us whenever he was back in England." Charney Hall Notes 11/1935, p3. Cumbria Record Office, Barrow-in-Furness, Ref.BDS16.

<sup>50</sup> J.F.Roxburgh (headmaster of Stowe), "Home and School" in Parents Review No.43 (1932), pp511-519.



### Age of Children:

Typically a prep school would take boys aged eight who would leave to go on to public school before they were fourteen. Occasionally boys would start earlier - the parents might, for example, be about to be posted abroad - but boys under the age of seven were not considered to be ready for boarding school. The consensus was that boys should leave home for school aged between seven and eight. This was not unique to the prep school. The Hadow Committee on the Primary School "confirmed the general practice of transferring children from the infant school to the primary school at about the age of seven."<sup>51</sup> Other commentators claimed that it was at about the age of eight that boys began to leave the 'apron-strings' of their mothers and re-orientate towards the masculine world. It was felt that at about this age it was time for them to learn independence and to begin the process of becoming 'manly'. A headmaster wrote "at about the age of eight he commences to have the feeling that, one day, he would like to be a man. He begins to feel that he would like to play cricket and football ... and wishes to be the inseperable companion of his father [or a schoolmaster]."<sup>52</sup> At eight boys were reckoned to be more able to adjust to the change in lifestyle which boarding school involved whereas after the age of nine they were supposed to be too hidebound and would find it difficult to adapt (particularly as their peers would have already been at the school for at least a year). A matron of many years

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<sup>51</sup> Report of the Consultative Committee on The Primary School (Hadow); H.M.S.O., 1931, p27.

<sup>52</sup> King (1924), p26.

experience wrote "the boys of seven to eight were less affected by this [homesickness] than the nine to ten year olds. The youngest ones were interested in their new life but the older ones were more aware of what they were losing in the way of home life."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, with a competitive examination (Common Entrance) to sit before public school entry was possible the prep school maintained that five years of preparation was necessary. One headmaster wrote: "You cannot have a boy at home until he is 9, 10 or 11, and at the same time have him as well advanced in his work at 13 as he would have been if he had started here at the normal age at the bottom of the ladder and worked his way up .... one of the chief difficulties of getting a boy through the Common Exam. is a late start."<sup>54</sup>

The logic behind transfer to public school at age 13/14 was that this was the time of puberty for most boys: before that they were not ready for the hurly-burly of the senior school and after puberty they would have out-grown their prep school. Prep schools fought hard to maintain this age of transfer, wary that any attempt by public schools to lower their age of entry to the 11 year old switch common in the state sector would leave them squeezed out between infant and senior schools. Their justifications included the notion that below 13 a boy was still a child, they would not be prepared for the 'morality' of the public school and that by staying on they were given the opportunity of leadership at an early age. In

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<sup>53</sup> Flora Scott, And One Ran Away (1991), p12.

<sup>54</sup> Heddon Court Magazine No.80 (10/1926), p7.

1920 the A.H.P.S. passed a resolution "deprecating any lowering of the age of entry to Public Schools"<sup>55</sup>

### Entry:

Unlike the public schools they supplied, the prep schools did not have a selective or competitive entry policy. One headmaster did give an idea of the academic standard required:

"He should know his arithmetic tables up to 12 times inside out, be well acquainted with the first four rules up to simple division, have some conception of the differences between the principal parts of speech, be able to read fluently and spell with some degree of accuracy simple words of two syllables, and be able to write legibly, however slowly."<sup>56</sup>

Some of the premier league schools enjoyed waiting lists and could afford to weed out the very weakest but even they tended to take boys in the order in which their parents had put their names down. If they were academically weak then it was the schools task to bring him up to standard or steer him toward the appropriate public school. Typically schools took "almost anybody"<sup>57</sup> and "it was always a bit of a struggle."<sup>58</sup>

How parents were recruited and the process of entry are covered in greater detail later.

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<sup>55</sup> Reported in P.S.R., 3/1920, p120.

<sup>56</sup> V.Seymour Bryant, St.Piran's, Maidenhead (1926), p37.

<sup>57</sup> Keyte.

<sup>58</sup> Belle.



### Single Sex Education:

The idea that boys and girls should be educated together was only beginning to catch on in the period. Traditionally only boys had been taught and when girls began to gain formal education it was usually in separate schools with a separate curriculum. This was not peculiar to the independent sector. Even by 1940 few prep schools were co-educational and such schools were mentioned with raised eyebrows by many oral sources. It is worth noting that I.A.P.S. membership, the mark of an established and 'respectable' prep school, was restricted to boys schools.<sup>59</sup> Few people involved in upper class education would have disputed the views of a contributor to the Saturday Review in 1932 when he wrote: "after nine or ten boys should be taught by men, and girls by women, in separate establishments."<sup>60</sup> This was justified by the claim that one sex needed some subjects while the other had different needs: the idea that women's education should differ from that of men continued until the 1960s.

### Location:

*"In imagination I see it from the air, a solid Georgian house approached by a wide and winding drive, with fir trees on the lawn, with shrubberies, with a walled kitchen garden and outbuildings galore. Beyond are meadows, the nearest to*

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<sup>59</sup> Although there was a separate organisation, the A.H.M.P.S., to cater for girls schools.

<sup>60</sup> J.D.Stewart-Pinner, "Should Private Schools be Abolished?" in Saturday Review, 21/5/1932, p513.

*the house being the playing field. Beyond again is the undulating English countryside."*<sup>61</sup>

Such is an image of a typical boarding prep school. There were, in fact, three broad types of location:

- 1/ Seaside/health resort.
- 2/ Suburban.
- 3/ Large house in rural area.

A location on the seaside, particularly the south coast, was a great favourite for the prep - around 40% were located near the sea. The reason for this was that it was perceived to be a healthy environment in pre-penicillin days and thus an excellent place for young boys to grow up. In her study of private schools in the Bognor Regis area Dr. Judith Lee notes that "a good healthy location was a priority particularly for the boarding school."<sup>62</sup> Forres moved from Northwood to Swanage after a doctor recommended ozone which was perceived to be coming off the sea.<sup>63</sup> When Hawtreys moved from Slough to Westgate-on-Sea the Headmaster was quite clear about the rationale: "for the sake of the dry and healthy climate, and the advantages of the sea."<sup>64</sup> He went on to note the "remarkably salubrious and invigorating air."<sup>65</sup> This became

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<sup>61</sup> James Kenward; Prep School (1958), p8. Although a novel this is a memory of Upton School, Ripple Vale, Nr. Deal, Kent.

<sup>62</sup> Judith Lee, "The history and development of private schools in Bognor Regis"; Ph.D. thesis, University of Sussex (1990), p147.

<sup>63</sup> Information from Rev. P.M. Chadwick.

<sup>64</sup> Hawtreys prospectus, 1887 - no page numbers.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

a feature of their marketing. Harecroft Hall, on the Cumberland coast, advertised:

"the combination of sea and mountain air makes the district a particularly healthy one for delicate boys, who go ahead in a remarkable way from their first week at the School, putting on weight rapidly."<sup>66</sup>

Lee's research indicates that 48% of schools in the Bognor Regis area made particular provision for treating 'delicate' boys in their seaside location.<sup>67</sup> Doctors were a very influential part of this. The Sandroyd records mention several boys who were removed to coastal schools on the recommendation of the school doctor. One oral source had bronchial trouble when young and remembered that his family doctor advised that the bracing climate of the east coast was better than the west coast and that the latter was the cause of his health problems. He was consequently removed from one school and placed in an establishment in Scarborough.<sup>68</sup> Another source noted how he was removed from school in Exeter to one in Weston-super-Mare for similar reasons.<sup>69</sup> Several sources offered the theory that London doctors had share-holdings in south coast prep schools and thus caused them to be recommended. Indeed in 1927 a headmaster from Deal had a motion passed at the I.A.P.S. conference against "the unprofessional pushing of other schools by doctors."<sup>70</sup> No evidence could be found to support or negate this view. There was a general vogue for fresh-air and outdoor

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<sup>66</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, pl.

<sup>67</sup> Lee (1990), p114.

<sup>68</sup> Information from Maj.Gen.Dare Wilson.

<sup>69</sup> Information from Sir Peter Stallard.

<sup>70</sup> Reported in T.E.S., 31/12/1927, p586.



schooling, especially for the delicate, in all schools at this time.

The consequence of all these factors was that a large number of schools became situated in coastal areas (see table).

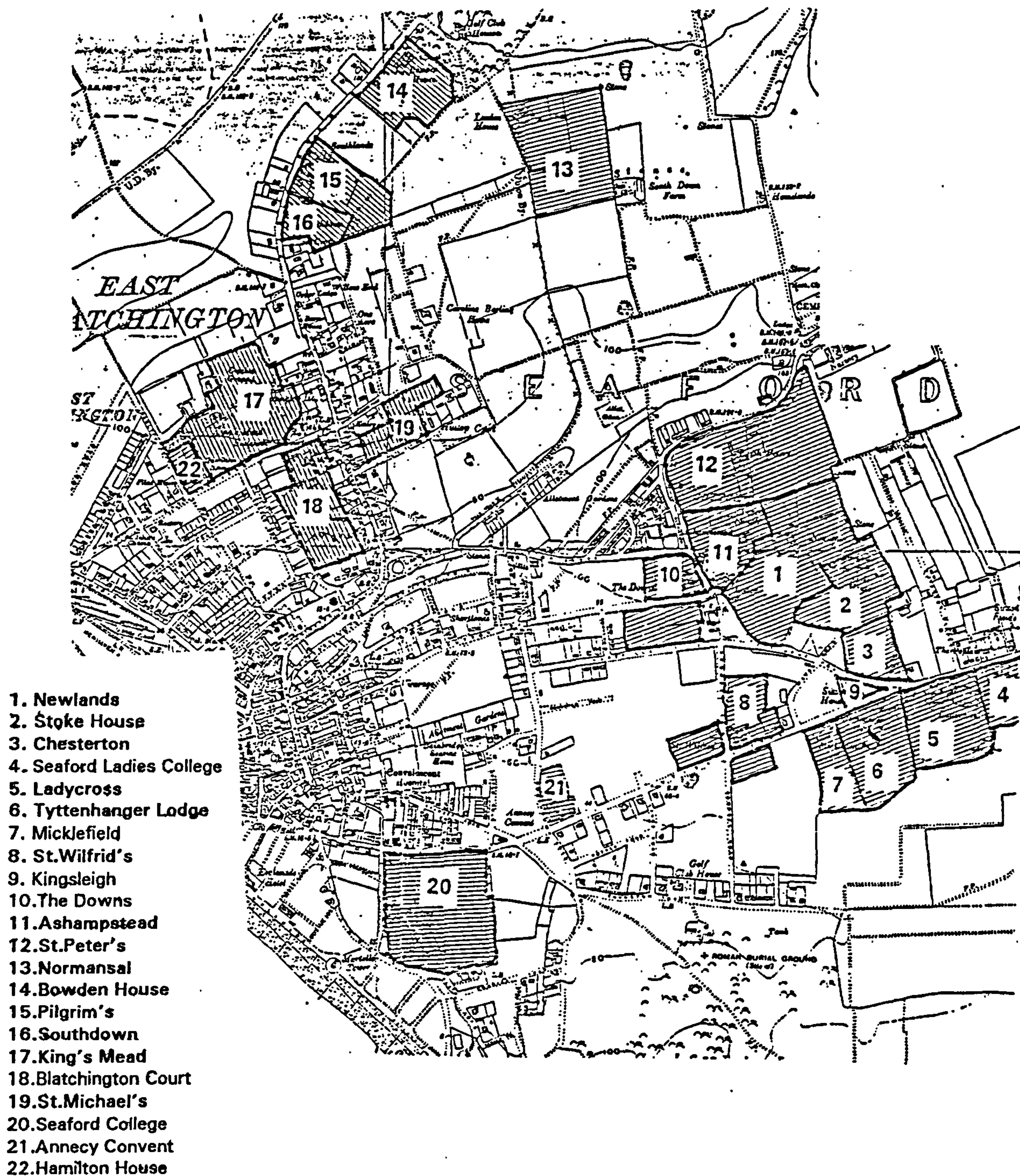
<u>SCHOOLS LOCATED ON THE SOUTH COAST</u>				
AREA	1926	1931	1936	1941
Thanet: <u>Birchington/Broadstairs/Margate/Ramsgate/Westgate</u>	33	29	24	1
Dover: <u>Deal/Dover/Eastry/Folkestone/Walmer</u>	12	12	11	2
Hastings: <u>Hastings/Ore/St. Leonards</u>	8	10	11	5
Bexhill-on-Sea:	10	14	13	1
Eastbourne:	23	20	13	1
Seaford:	15	14	15	3
Brighton: <u>Brighton/Rottingdean</u>	19	15	14	2
Worthing: <u>Ferring/Worthing</u>	9	6	7	2
Bognor: <u>Aldwick/Arundel/Bognor/Littlehampton</u>	7	9	9	-
Southampton-Portsmouth: <u>Cosham/Emsworth/Fareham/Hayling/Southampton/Southsea</u>	10	13	13	4
Bournemouth: <u>Barton-on-Sea/Bournemouth/Highcliffe/New Milton/Parkstone/Southbourne</u>	16	17	16	8
Swanage: <u>Langton Matravers/Swanage</u>	5	6	7	8
TOTAL NUMBER:	162	159	146	29
AS A % OF ALL PREP SCHOOLS:	28	25	22	5

Some areas became famous for their concentration of private schools. Eastbourne is the most well-known of these but in terms of density of prep schools the Isle of Thanet and Seaford are quite extraordinary. Seaford was a town dominated by prep schools. As a local historian wrote recently: "Seaford's good air, quiet surroundings and extensive sites for purpose-built premises made it the ideal place for the establishment of private schools."<sup>71</sup> During the First World War the army had men stationed in sites all over England and their health was monitored; those at Seaford had the best health. By 1925 prep schools had sprung up all over Seaford and they even had their own Seaford Schools Association which synchronised the beginnings and endings of terms, had its own school train, was represented on the District Council and contributed to the clergy stipend. The map of Seaford in 1925 overleaf illustrates this point, the schools identified in bold were prep schools.

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71 "Looking back at the schooldays of yesteryear" in Sussex Express, 1/5/1992.





The South Coast gradually began to lose its popularity and with the fierce competition of the 1930s schools started to close. The table above illustrates this point as well as revealing the effect of war - a subject covered in greater detail elsewhere. Other towns deemed 'healthy' such as Malvern and Harrogate experienced similar patterns of popularity. Malvern was said to have "a climate which is mild, yet bracing, and one that



secures and maintains abundant mental and physical vigour."<sup>72</sup> It too began to decline in popularity toward the end of the period: from 12 schools in 1924 only 7 were left by 1940.

Prep schools did not necessarily remain in a fixed location. As boarding schools, and schools serving a regional rather than local need, there was little compulsion for them to remain in unsuitable or unpleasant premises. The move toward coastal locations has already been identified but schools also moved for other reasons particularly when their existing location became unsuitable. Cheam moved to Newbury in 1934 to escape the encroachment of London. Elstree moved to Reading for similar reasons and also that "In the motor age parents were showing a preference for sending their children to school further from London than Elstree."<sup>73</sup> An advertisement for Sandle Manor noted that "As, however, the School has now been completely surrounded by houses, Mr.Meakin has removed the whole School to Sandle Manor, Fordingbridge."<sup>74</sup> There are many similar examples.

The location of the school had an important influence on the children within. The experience of living in the country with its attendant space and rural pastimes created a lasting impression with many boys and probably helped reinforce a love of the countryside among England's upper classes. 20% of Sandroyd old boys mentioned the fine grounds and neighbouring

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<sup>72</sup> Hillstone School prospectus, late 1930s, p3.

<sup>73</sup> I.C.M.Sanderson, A History of Elstree School (1978), p66.

<sup>74</sup> Advertisement in Schools 1937, p320.

Oxshott woods as being things they particularly enjoyed about their prep school days. Board of Education Inspectors at Nevill Holt in Leicestershire wrote:

"The boys live and receive their education in a building that has seen more than nine centuries of history, has grown in comfort and stateliness with each addition, and now cannot fail to impress the young mind both healthily and happily."<sup>75</sup>

School promotional material emphasised desirable locations:

"Dumpton House stands in its own grounds of four and a half acres, in the healthiest part of the Isle of Thanet .... The house commands a view of the sea, while the trees and parkland surrounding it ensure that its position is not too exposed. The situation and surroundings are very beautiful and have that charm and seclusion so necessary for the correct development of the young mind."<sup>76</sup>

These pleasant surroundings carried appeal for those parents who could not sustain such a lifestyle themselves.

### Foundation:

The reasons for a school's inception vary according to individual circumstances. St.Hugh's, Woodhall Spa, was founded when two staff at St.Peter's, Seaford, decided to marry each other. They identified Lincolnshire as a county underserved by prep schools and chose the "central and attractive position of Woodhall Spa."<sup>77</sup> Mowden Hall originated at a ladies bridge party in Gosforth when one lady complained to the headmaster-to-be's wife that there was no prep school in

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75 Board of Education Inspection Report, Nevill Holt, 11/1929. PRO Kew ED109/3402, p2.

76 Dumpton House prospectus, late 1930s (no pagination).

77 H.D.Martineau, Half a Century of St.Hugh's School, Woodhall Spa (1975), p3.

the Darlington district.<sup>78</sup> Huyton Hill was founded by a public school master after being urged by parents to do so. Often schools were started by prep or public school masters wanting promotion and to run their own school. St.Richards was founded by a very sincere Roman Catholic as a religious school - a venture encouraged by the Headmaster of Douai.<sup>79</sup>

Starting a prep school from scratch was no easy task. Not only had premises to be found and paid for but then parents had to be persuaded to support the new venture. Personal connections were crucial to success. These might come from previous experience in prep schools or as a tutor to a well-known family<sup>80</sup> or simply from family friends and relatives. Initially the school might begin with 10 - 15 boys but for the school to survive this number had to be worked up toward 40 within a few years. The high failure rate of new prep schools in the period is largely due to the inability of unestablished schools to recruit customers.

The alternative to starting a school was buying an existing one. As private businesses prep schools tended to be sold when the headmaster wished to retire. The funds released by the sale of his school then provided a retirement income. Prospective heads might either be offered the whole school or a partnership. The accepted method of disposing of a school

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78 F.H.Marchbank, Brief History of Mowden 1935 - 1958 (1975), pl.

79 I am grateful to Mr.Caspar Tremlett for this information.

80 As in the case of John Catlow, the founder of Wood Hall, who had been tutor to the Earl of Staines.



was via a school transfer agent - the best-known being Gabbitas and Thring. One retired headmaster explained the procedure:

"You wrote to Gabbitas and Thring. They wrote you a very secret message - they didn't give the name of the headmaster or the school, you just got the idea of where it was and usually one could guess which it was. It was rather like buying a house: you got heaps of notices to think about."<sup>81</sup>

Gabbitas, and its offshoot rival Truman and Knightley, usually had a range of schools for sale on their books. A typical particulars sheet read as follows:

"Private and confidential Notice of PARTNERSHIP (or Transfer etc.) in a first-rate successful Preparatory School for the sons of gentlemen in a beautiful part of the country in the Western Midlands.

Dear Sir,

We have been informed by a friend and client of our Firm, a University Graduate, that he feels the time has come when he should retire ... "<sup>82</sup>

It then went on to describe location, buildings (including accommodation) and basic accounts details. If the buyer was interested then he was put in touch and usually went to see the school. This invariably involved a close examination of the books to see if the school was really a going concern.

Not surprisingly, particularly given the low level of prep school masters' salaries, only a few people could afford the outlay such a purchase entailed. Occasionally the retiring headmaster would be prepared to leave some capital behind, and partnerships did not cost the same as an outright sale, but usually bank loans or the generosity of parents were utilised.

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<sup>81</sup> Mr.Geoffrey Tolson (St.Peter's, Weston-super-Mare), interview 8/1992.

<sup>82</sup> Transfer notice 6031 (Aymestry) 29/4/1930. Gabbitas archives.

St.Peter's, Weston-super-Mare, cost £17000 in 1937 at a time when the average master's salary was around £200 per annum. It was bought by the father of the new headmaster.<sup>83</sup> Another father spent £19000 on Rose Hill in 1922 because his son did not seem destined for any particular career.<sup>84</sup> Becoming a headmaster in this way could be a daunting prospect. Not only must one rise to the challenges of exercising authority over boys and staff but also run a business, frequently already overdrawn, as well. When Harold Taylor became headmaster of Cheam in 1921 he faced the combined problems of having had no previous connection with the school, a fall in entries prior to the retirement of the previous incumbent, a large debt and a rent to pay.<sup>85</sup> With a constant pressure to economise and keep fees low one commentator noted "a major qualification for an impressive headmaster ... is an ability to effect major structural improvements on the cheap."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Tolson.

<sup>84</sup> I am grateful to the Revd.David Hughes for this information.

<sup>85</sup> Edward Peel, Cheam School Since 1645 (1974), p219.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Vansittart, Marlborough House School 1874 - 1974. A Memoir (1989), p12.

### The I.A.P.S. and Inspections:

*"This meeting is of the opinion that it is not advisable for boys under fifteen to use a full-sized ball with the wickets pitched at twenty-two yards."*<sup>87</sup>

Such was the first resolution of the organisation which was to develop into the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (I.A.P.S.). The history of this organisation has been well-examined elsewhere<sup>88</sup> but by the inter-war period it was a well-established and influential aspect of the prep school scene. Membership of the I.A.P.S. was by headmaster rather than school and once every year members would meet for a conference covering a wide range of topics of mutual interest. Retired heads felt these meetings were useful although they noted that "Heads were fairly guarded about how they run their schools and information was discussed rather than shared."<sup>89</sup> The organisation was influential in developing the Common Entrance exam and pensions for assistant staff. By this period almost all reputable prep schools were run by I.A.P.S. (or A.H.P.S. before incorporation in 1923) heads.

In 1929 the conference passed the resolution that "This Council considers it most desirable in the interests of the I.A.P.S. that members should apply for inspection by the

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<sup>87</sup> First resolution of the A.H.P.S. passed 30/3/1892. Quoted in Donald Leinster-Mackay, The Rise of the English Prep School (1984), p167.

<sup>88</sup> See Leinster-Mackay (1984) and Arthur Harrison, How Was That, Sir? (1975).

<sup>89</sup> Mr. Geoffrey Tolson (St. Peter's, Weston-super-Mare), interview 8/1992.



Board of Education."<sup>90</sup> and by 1933 it had become a rule of Association membership. Although some members opposed what they saw as a restriction on their individuality the value of inspection lay in the helpful report and the recognition that followed. Thanks to the efforts of the I.A.P.S. prep schools had been classified as secondary schools and were thus exempt from having to pay for the inspection. In March 1931 142 I.A.P.S. schools were 'recognised as efficient', two years later it was 210 and by 1940 all members had gained the title. The inspections were very thorough:

"In the two days they were busy men, who were present at games, in the swimming bath, the carpentery shop, the drawing class, the music room, the singing class, and finally in the dormitories when boys were going to bed."<sup>91</sup>

Most schools noted that "it was not perhaps such an ordeal as had been anticipated"<sup>92</sup> and "In the event our visitors proved sympathetic and quite human"<sup>93</sup> The reports they made were usually favourable.

### Categories of Prep Schools

Not all prep schools enjoyed the same status: some were clearly superior to others. In his study of Victorian public schools John Honey developed a categorisation system based on links between schools. This is less easy with the prep schools for, with the possible exception of a few schools,

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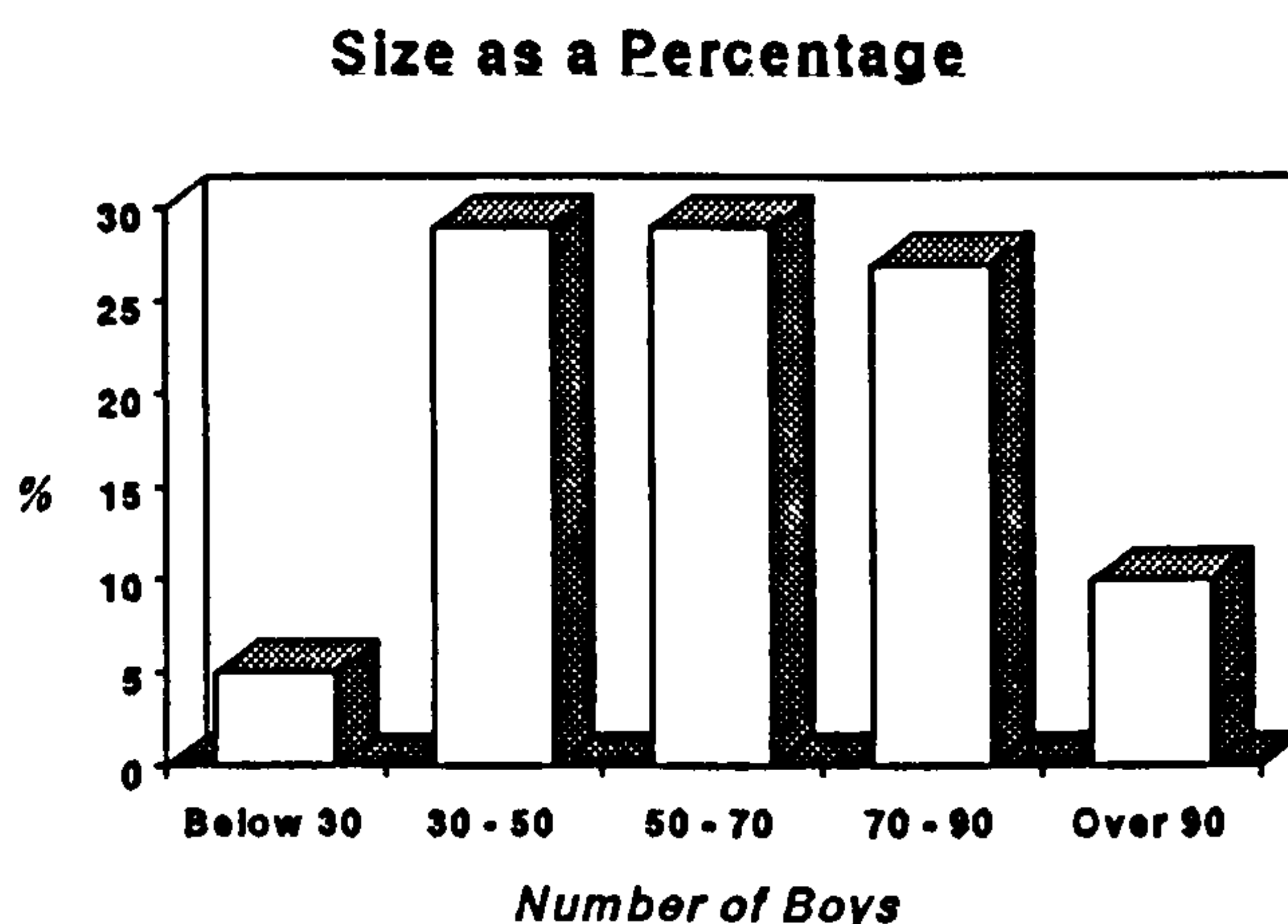
<sup>90</sup> P.S.R. 7/1929, p45.

<sup>91</sup> "An Inspection" in P.S.R., 11/1930, p175.

<sup>92</sup> Aldeburgh Lodge Magazine, Vol.6 No.8 (Summer 1921), p497.

<sup>93</sup> The Cottesmorian, 12/1929, p162.

their links were simply with all the local prep schools. For example Sandroyd, without question a 'premier league' prep school in this period, played games with all local prep schools and did not confine itself to those considered higher class. Similarly staff were mobile between all classes of school although no doubt a period of service at a well-known establishment carried some weight. It might be possible to categorise them by the Public Schools which they supplied but records for this are difficult to obtain: either the prep school has closed or does not possess them or the public school did not note the prep school on its pupils files. Size is not a particularly good guide either. While the average school size was 61 boys, school sizes were spread across a wide range:



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While many prestigious schools were large not all large schools were prestigious. Equally some expensive and elite schools were comparatively small.

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94 Taken from a random sample of 41 inspected schools. The smallest was Dumpton with 26 (dropping to 18 at one point) while the largest was Stubbington House with 124 (rising to 138 at one point).

However there are factors which might be considered when attempting to create a national 'league' of such schools. These include:

- fees: some schools were notably more expensive (see separate section).
- feeder to: the public schools which boys then attended.
- size: larger schools tended to be better known and often more expensive.
- premises: some schools were extremely well equipped - Sandroyd, for example, had a heated indoor swimming pool while Aysgarth featured an indoor rifle range and King's Mead a spacious sick-wing with four or five rooms.
- scholarship record: this was seen at the time as a good guide to the status of a school. A proliferation of, say, Winchester scholarships, was definitely a 'good thing'.
- date of foundation: older schools, therefore more established, had already established a reputation. However by the 1930s somewhat-known names such as Twyford and Temple Grove had fallen on distinctly hard times.
- I.A.P.S. membership/"recognised" status: most reputable and established schools had headmasters who were members of the I.A.P.S. After 1930 recognition became a requirement of membership and thus all I.A.P.S. schools attained at least a reasonable standard.
- boarding/day: day prep schools or those taking day



pupils rarely gained the same status.

- staff: a predominance of Oxbridge graduates/blues may have enhanced status.
- parents: a clue to the status of the school was the nature of the parents. Well-known men sent their sons to well-known schools.

Using these criteria it is possible to broadly categorise prep schools:

- 1 Premier: nationally known, large (over 70 pupils), well-equipped/purpose built, IAPS membership/recognised, prominent headmasters (e.g. I.A.P.S. Chairmen), feed to Clarendon schools, more expensive, well-established, Oxbridge staff, excellent scholarship and games record.  
*Examples: Sandroyd, Aysgarth.*
2. First-Division: well-known locally or nationally known but with a different/alternative reputation (*Example: The Downs, Colwall*), feed to major public schools with a scholarship every few years, no day-boys, medium-sized (40 - 70 boys), graduate staff, I.A.P.S. membership.  
*Examples: The Wells House, Aldro, Boxgrove.*
3. Second-Division: small (under 50), non-I.A.P.S./recognised, only rarely feed to Clarendon schools, poor/no scholarship record, unqualified/unsuitable staff, flighty nature (recently established, financially borderline), some day-boys, cheap. Various short-lived examples. This group also includes sound schools which were very small and not well known  
*Examples: Dumpton House, Chartridge Hill House.*

Retired headmasters and staff who taught in the period were agreed that there were classes of prep school and all were able to mention schools that were 'good' or 'bad' although these opinions were not always consistent. Old boys were also aware of the difference in status between schools. One Sandroyd old boy wrote: "Sandroyd was inevitably a school for the rich. My parents were relatively poor and ... I felt like an 'inferior mortal'."<sup>95</sup> The headmasters of such schools were well-aware of their status. Another Old Sandroydian remembered:

"One day after I left I re-visited the school ... [and] was courteously received by the new headmaster, Mr.Ozanne. He said 'Very sporting of you to call. I must now go and teach the scriptures to the future rulers of Europe.'"<sup>96</sup>

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Although they were essentially closed institutions prep schools were not completely isolated from events in the outside world. Indeed, the history and values of society have usually dictated those of the prep school. Outside events have frequently intruded upon the prep school and contributed to the nature of life within. The next chapter summarises the origins and 19th century history of the prep school and then considers the effects of the main world events of the 1918 - 1940 period: the First World War, the Depression and the Second World War.

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<sup>95</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.137.

<sup>96</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.127.

## 4: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### Origins and Nineteenth Century Development:

Until the pioneering work of Donald Leinster-Mackay little was known about the early history of the prep school. Prep schools did not exist before 1800 yet by 1900 had come to form an integral component of the well-known public school system.

The oldest prep schools have varied roots. Some are choir schools founded in the Middle Ages; others have developed from Dame schools; a few, such as Cheam, were classical schools, and others were schools originally founded by clergymen in their Rectories. It is impossible to fix a date for the first 'proper' prep school although several schools lay claim to the title. The key elements - no boys over 14 and a curriculum designed to prepare for future education at another school - have been evident to various degrees in a number of schools.

Prep schools as a genre really become apparent from about 1860 onward. The Clarendon Report (1864) made mention of prep schools and recommended them for younger boys but the real explosion in prep school numbers came in the 1870's and 80's. This huge growth was due to various factors:

1. Public schools began to discourage the attendance of younger boys.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the mid 19th century the older public schools deliberately detached themselves from their junior departments as they did not wish to become too locally based. Conversely, though, by the end of the century many minor public schools began to establish their own preparatory schools.



2. Parents demanded boarding schools for children of more tender years.
3. An increasingly affluent society fuelled demand for independent education.

A prep school education became a prerequisite for public school entry and was necessary to win one of the scholarships which such schools were increasingly offering. As public schools came to dominate secondary education private schoolmasters realised the opportunities that the prep school provided. Some public schools established or encouraged their own junior schools.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century a large number of such schools existed. In 1892 they formed their own association. Life within them was tough but, with smaller numbers and greater regulation, supervision was closer and more careful than that of the public school. Their ethos mirrored that of the older schools as did the emphasis on classics and games. Liason between them became close and by 1914 they had become firmly established as the initial component of the public school system.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For further information refer to Donald Leinster-Mackay, The Rise of the English Prep School (1984).

## The First World War:

The period encompassed by this study begins at the end of what was then the greatest conflict known to mankind, a war in which millions of men had been killed and a whole period of history brought to a close.

In 1914 few anticipated that the war would last so long or have so devastating an impact. In prep schools life continued as it had done since Victorian times:

"Ascham St.Vincent's seemed like a little world of its own to a small boy starting his school years there. It was something that seemed to have been there since the beginning of time. The possibility of its ever ceasing to exist seemed as unlikely as the sun failing to rise one morning or the earth ceasing to spin on its axis. Little did we think in those happy days up to July 1914 how soon the whole framework of our lives and those of the whole nation would be shaken to its foundations by the outbreak of the greatest wars the world had ever known."<sup>3</sup>

The effect of the war was, in fact, less than might be imagined. Certainly some schools, particularly those close to France or the coast, did decide to evacuate and one or two areas suffered light bombing. But for most the physical effect was a small one:

"We had little contact with the war itself .... The aeroplane was in its infancy, and such Zeppelins as came across to England found their way to London and the Midlands. We saw a few naval patrol boats in the harbour, but little else to remind us of the war. An

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<sup>3</sup> Gaspard Willis, Ascham 1889 - 1989 (1989), p14.

occasional uniform perhaps and patriotic propaganda in newspapers and on hoardings.

There was, of course, no radio."<sup>4</sup>

All schools became involved in the war effort: teachers readily accepted the propaganda and encouraged children to follow the wars progress and assist in practical ways - although one wonders how valuable the knitting of a 10 year old boy would have been. More seriously for prep schools large numbers of young masters volunteered and the supply of new ones was re-directed. They were replaced by older men, many of whom had retired or were unsuitable for teaching, and sometimes by women who broke into what had been an exclusively male bastion. Sometimes, however, the boys were acutely touched by the suffering of war. At Sandroyd:

"One of the young masters ... returned from the front to visit the school. His appearance horrified the boys. Bandaged and half-blinded, with a patch across one eye, he was scarcely recognisable as the debonair young man who had taught them only a matter of months before. He died not long afterwards."<sup>5</sup>

It was more distressing for the staff, particularly those who had taught the young men who were being killed at such a horrifying rate. At The Leas, Hoylake, one in every five old boys were killed in the war<sup>6</sup>; at Sandroyd the figure was 15% killed and 23% seriously wounded. The Headmaster of Cheam heard news of the death of one of the boys he had taught at an average rate of one in every twelve days.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> L.W.T.; Dorset House 1914 - 1921; undated manuscript in Dorset House archives.

<sup>5</sup> Diana Bonakis Webster, Hawkeseye. The Early Life of Christopher Hawkes (1991), p56.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Monsarrat, Life Is A Four Letter Word (1966), p84.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Peel, Cheam School since 1645 (1974), p216.



By the end of the war the clientele of the prep school were under greater pressure than ever before. The turmoil and trauma of war had witnessed the demise of many old loyalties and allegiances. With the emergence of the Labour party, party politics was no longer a simple choice between Liberal and Conservative. Investments once considered safe were now at risk and this, combined with heavy taxation, left the old landed aristocracy feeling especially threatened. The cost of living had risen and domestic labour had become harder to obtain. Furthermore many young fathers or potential fathers had been killed or wounded and many more found it difficult to find jobs and then keep them. When the boys at Sandroyd "celebrated the Peace of Versailles with an issue of Stone's Ginger Beer"<sup>8</sup> their masters had to contend with the troubles of a new age.

The first shock was the influenza epidemic of 1919. Across the country thousands died with no effective treatment available. At Sandroyd the headmaster resigned after two boys and his wife, who had been nursing them, died. Schools coming back to their evacuated premises sometimes found them in an appalling state. At Aldeburgh Lodge "everything which could be moved or burned had been."<sup>9</sup> For several years economic uncertainty cast its shadow over fee-paying schools.

In many ways the ethos of the prep school had hardly changed and their place in the educational system was not being

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<sup>8</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.133.

<sup>9</sup> Information from Mrs.Belle, interview 12/1992.

questioned. The War did, however, leave a legacy which was to last until the next terrible conflict twenty-one years later. Old boys from the 1930s remember reading the Roll of those who fell every Armistice Day and most schools had some form of memorial to those who had died. The Sandroyd War Memorial fund had reached a balance of £248 by December 1920 and when the money was spent on a memorial tablet in chapel the Headmaster announced "We can have no more heartfelt wish for those who pass and read than that they will prove as noble and true men in their generation as those whose names we here hold in memory and honour."<sup>10</sup>

The war left a living legacy in the form of many prep school masters. Particularly in the period before demobilisation "the quality of the staff left a good deal to be desired."<sup>11</sup> The inspectors at Lockers Park wrote: "It is fair to say that Hoare and Pease were both still suffering from shell shock and that Fisher is partly crippled."<sup>12</sup> For many ex-servicemen, wounded by war, prep school teaching was one of the few options available despite its poor pay and the mocking of merciless small boys. One old boy remembered a Mr. Pullen who:

"was supposed to teach us grammar, but his grasp of the subject was as shaky as that of his pupils and he could easily be diverted by the well-worn request 'Oh Sir, tell us about the battle of the Somme, Sir.' A steel helmet was produced with a dent in it (a narrow

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<sup>10</sup> The Sandroydian No.67 (January 1921), p3.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Richmond, A History of Ashdown House (1991), p20.

<sup>12</sup> [ ] notes added to Board of Education Inspection Report, Lockers Park, 1919. PRO Kew ED109/2073.

shave from a German sniper) and the climax of his story was reached when our sappers exploded a vast mine under the German lines."<sup>13</sup>

Glenhow gained a new headmaster in 1928, a Major Innes:

"He was a Gallipoli veteran who had more than his fair share of shell shock. Once or twice a year he would go 'off his rocker', sweating profusely with his eyes staring out of his face."<sup>14</sup>

As the Twenties progressed the country returned to some sort of normality and prosperity returned. Prep schools settled down to their routine and it seemed no threats, either economic or military, loomed on the horizon. In 1930 came the Depression.

### The Depression:

The Wall Street crash and the worldwide depression which followed hit the prep school world hard. The Elstree historian wrote:

"Parents who had entered their sons began to withdraw them and in the next six years many schools had to close or amalgamate with other schools, and even the best known Public Schools had vacancies."<sup>15</sup>

In 1931 I.A.P.S. members, meeting at their annual conference, made suggestions for economies: while no saving could be achieved on food or salaries "entertainment might be slightly diminished"<sup>16</sup>, Sunday suits could double as weekday suits,

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<sup>13</sup> P.H.Crassweller; "Shirley House in the Twenties"; p2.

<sup>14</sup> P.B.Moore, "Glenhow School. Research into a history of the school.", 1990, p13.

<sup>15</sup> I.C.M.Sanderson, A History of Elstree School (1978), p60.

<sup>16</sup> P.S.R. 11/1931, p249.



boys could be used as help in the gardens or with domestic work and games' expenses reduced by fewer matches and less extravagant spending on colours blazers and suchlike.<sup>17</sup> It was hardly radical but then the effects were not felt immediately.

It was by the mid-thirties that the combined effect of a decline in the number of boys<sup>18</sup>, an even greater decline in the number of parents willing and able to pay the fees, and fees that were insufficient to cover costs, was more than many schools could bear: in 1936 and 37 nearly a hundred prep schools closed or amalgamated; more men were encouraged to become partners to inject much-needed capital. At the beginning of the 1930s there had been 531 schools in membership of the I.A.P.S. but by the end there were only 457.<sup>19</sup> In his book The Rise of the English Prep School, Dr. Donald Leinster-Mackay cites competition from L.E.A. schools as exacerbating the situation. This may have been the case with some day schools but there is no evidence to suggest that boarding prep school clients were considering this type of school as an alternative.<sup>20</sup>

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17 T.E.S. 26/12/1931, p488.

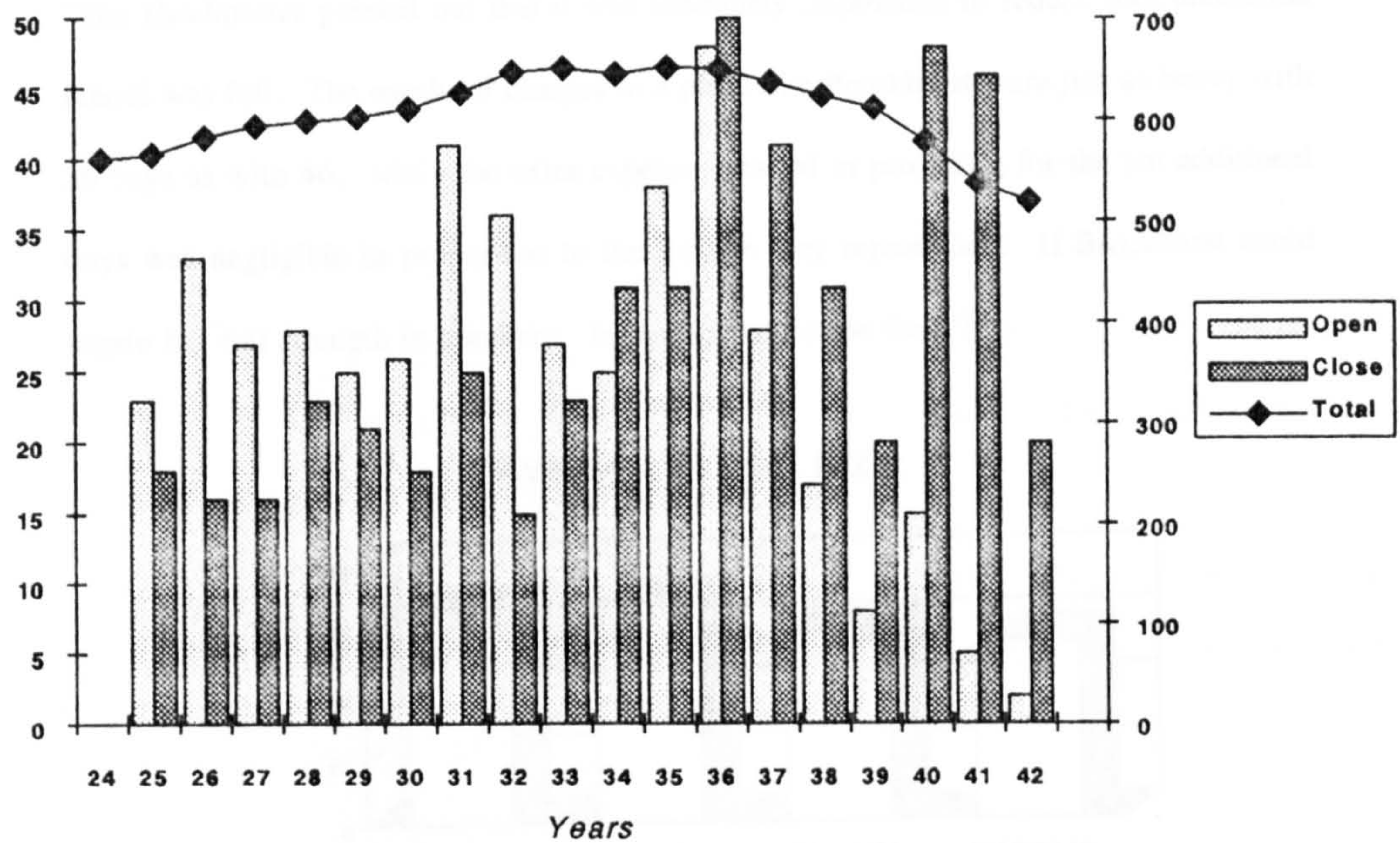
18 This was a legacy of the generation lost in the First World War. In 1901 there had been 5 265 000 males under 14 in Britain. By 1931 this had fallen to 4 808 000. Given the large proportion of officers who fell in WW1 the decline in the number of upper class boys was probably even more profound.

19 Arthur Harrison, How Was That, Sir? (1975), p47.

20 Leinster-Mackay (1984), p244.

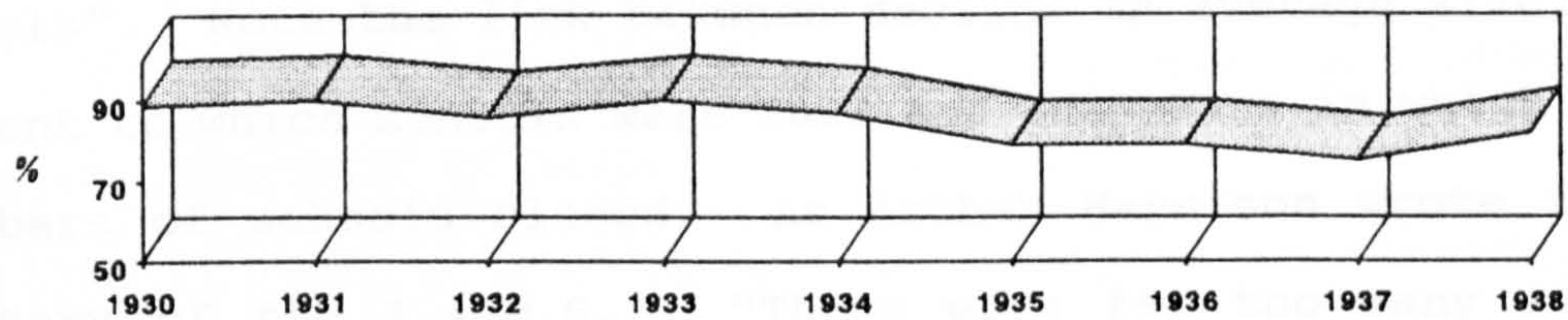


Boys Boarding Preparatory Schools In England



21

School size as a % of pre-1930 max.



22

The prep school operated on tight profit margins and even a moderate decline in numbers could make a dramatic difference to financial viability. At West Downs a decline from over a 100 in 1930 to just over 80 in 1935 "made a great difference to profitability and the availability of funds for less essential

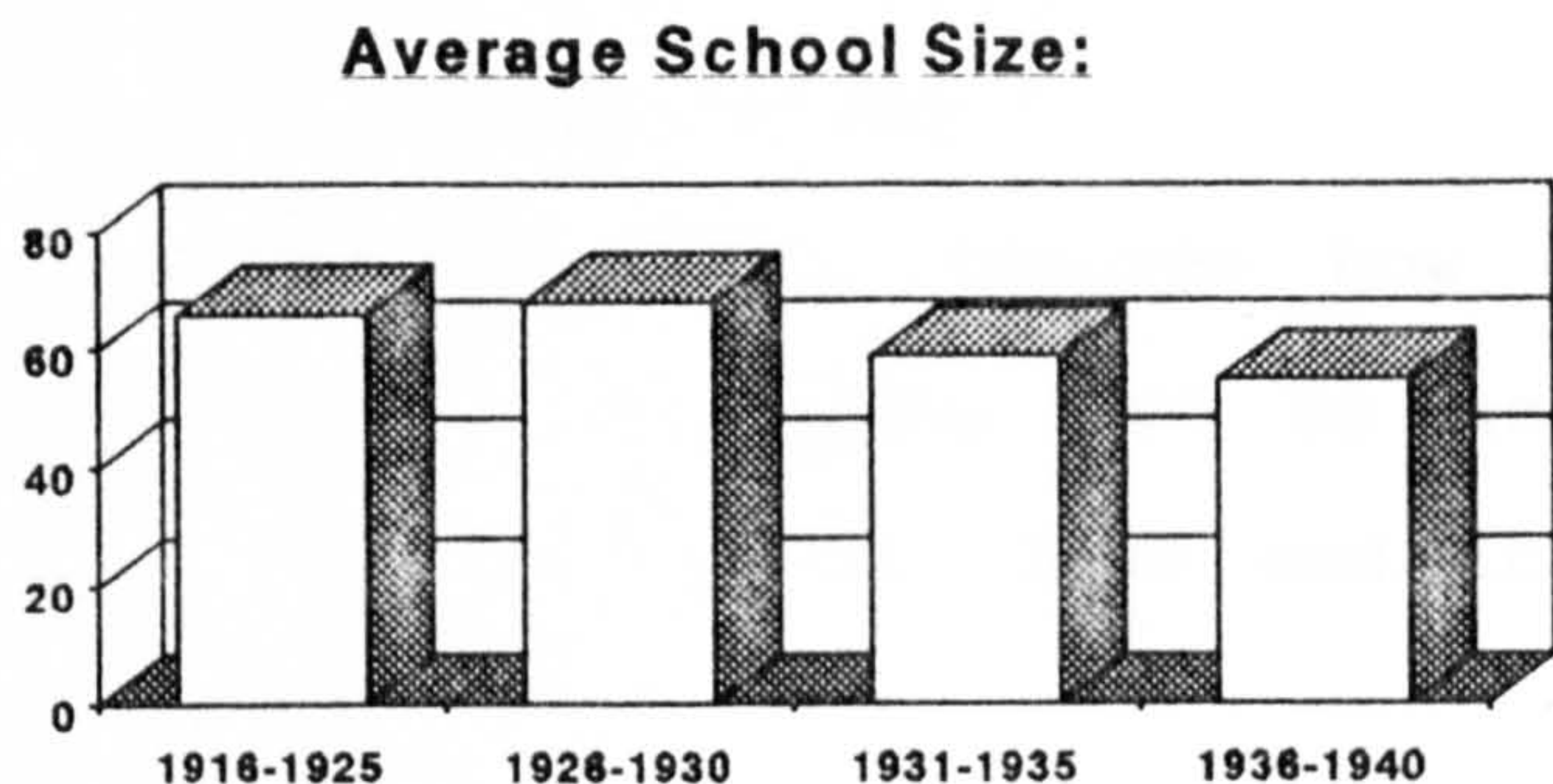
21 Based on appearances in Truman and Knightley's Schools guides for the years 1924 - 1942.

22 Based on a sample of 16 randomly selected inspected schools. Data taken from Board of Education Inspection Reports at PRO Kew ED109.



items."<sup>23</sup> The headmaster of Brockhurst appealed to parents to promote the school:

"The Headmaster pointed out that it was absolutely impossible to reduce fees unless the school was full. The overhead charges in a place like Brockhurst were just as heavy with 36 boys as with 46, while the extra expense entailed in providing for the ten additional boys was negligible in proportion to the income they represented. If Brockhurst could regain her full strength in numbers, he would reduce the fees."<sup>24</sup>



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As the graph above indicates, the average size of prep schools declined notably and most schools were below their pre-1930 levels<sup>26</sup>. Note the link between decline in average size, the extent to which schools were full and the years in which large numbers of schools closed. As Arthur Harrison wrote in his history of the I.A.P.S.: "There were far too many schools ready to cater for too few boys and for parents with too slender bank balances."<sup>27</sup>

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23 Mark Hichens, West Downs. A Portrait of an English Prep School (1992), pp91-2.

24 The Brock, Summer 1932, p8.

25 Based on a sample of 27 randomly selected inspected schools. Data taken from Board of Education Inspection Reports at PRO Kew ED109.

26 Temple Grove in 1937 was 44% of its pre-1930 best (although this was partly because the school had moved premises and the new Headmaster did not wish to have such high numbers). On the other hand a few schools actually managed to improve their position: Pinewood in 1936 was 109% of its pre-1930 best.

27 Harrison (1975), p46.



Contemporary sources are full of the difficulties schools faced. The Board of Education's inspectors commented on "the severe competition of recent years"<sup>28</sup> while The Twyfordian recorded:

"No one who knows the school can deny that, like many other schools, Twyford is passing through a time of anxiety; and, if it had not been for the confidence which they have shown in the school, it might well have proved a time of disaster.... In a letter which has already been sent to all Twyfordians, it has been made plain that the present financial position of the school can bear no unnecessary stress."<sup>29</sup>

The history of Harecroft Hall records how the difficult financial position of the school led to an embarrassing situation on the platform as the boys and staff waited to depart:

"three masters held a meeting at one end of the platform and with heads bent the three talked earnestly and seriously for some minutes before marching as a deputation to the Headmaster. Vallance must have known what was taking place, for it turned out he was facing an ultimatum. The masters had not been paid their termly salary cheques, and they were not going to get on the train until Vallance forked out."<sup>30</sup>

The Brock records the Headmaster's speech at Brockhurst on Parents day in 1936:

"It was not a cheerful speech and it was not intended to be. It was intended to make parents realise, perfectly plainly, the present position of the school .... The really depressing part is simply this: that in spite of the ideal situation of the place ... Brockhurst is not full .... The headmaster appealed for the continued co-operation of parents in the work of securing new boys, and asked for whatever advice they could give him.

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<sup>28</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report on Temple Grove, 1938. School archives. p2.

<sup>29</sup> The Twyfordian, 12/1937, p45.

<sup>30</sup> T.D.Penrice, manuscript history of Harecroft Hall, 1979, p10. The headmaster eventually wrote out a cheque for each man in the waiting room.

Preparatory schools everywhere are going through difficult times; there is a shortage of boys and a shortage of money."<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately fine facilities and excellent staff could not compensate for a fall in fees income. The inevitable happened:

"Although there had been rumours about the future of the School, there was shock and dismay amongst the boys when an emotional Monty Snow [the Headmaster], his wife Lilian and son Edward at his side, announced, during the 1935 summer term, that this was to be the last term and the School will be closing down at the end of the term."<sup>32</sup>

It was usual to delay announcing closure until as late as possible in order to avoid making a loss in the final term.

If the depression was a difficult time for prep schools then the Second World War was catastrophic. Nearly half the schools failed to survive and for those that did a great deal of their world would be irrevocably changed.

#### The Second World War:

The period covered by this study ends in 1940. This is as well, for the effect of this war on prep schools is a study in itself. One retired master said "The war changed so much in the preparatory school world."<sup>33</sup>

The fear of war began with the Munich Crisis of 1938. The Brockhurst magazine mentioned that "The dark days, through

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31 The Brock, Summer 1936, pp8-9.

32 Charles Robbs, Northdown Hill and Clare House (1983), p297.

33 J.R.Thompson (Marlborough House), interview 10/1993.

which our country passed in October, drew attention to the extremely safe nature of our geographical position."<sup>34</sup> Schools closer to potential targets began to make preparations for a move to safer quarters. The headmaster of Pinewood wrote: "Farnborough has, however, become too military a district for these alarmist days; and a permanent move has become a necessity."<sup>35</sup> Schools such as Feltonfleet and Sandroyd in Surrey both took out leases on houses in the West Country in case of war. King's Mead actually evacuated itself for a few weeks before returning to Seaford and having to evacuate again in 1939.

When the war finally broke out many schools were prepared. There was much talk of evacuation and some pressure to send children abroad. Many children, and some complete schools, did go to North America. Abinger Hill went to Canada and Belmont, Hassocks, decamped to the Bahamas. Most schools, however, moved to safer areas in the United Kingdom. Some schools were forced to move when their properties were requisitioned. Pinewood moved to Melchet court near Romsey in 1939 and they had no sooner re-established themselves when their new home was taken over by the army and they were forced to move again. The maps overleaf show the path of evacuation. The fall of France in 1940 forced many schools to evacuate and some who had already moved had to move again. The difficulty of moving, finding satisfactory accommodation and keeping the school together led to many closures and amalgamations. While

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34 The Brock, Christmas 1938, p3.

35 The Blue and Grey, Spring 1939, p1.



establishments in remote areas increased their numbers as parents sought a safer school for their sons for most heads it was an extremely difficult time. St.Hugh's, Woodhall Spa moved to a house on the Lancashire/Yorkshire border:

"The scenery was superb, but playing fields and other amenities were sadly lacking, and Mr.Forbes was deeply depressed by what seemed to him the ruin of St.Hugh's School and of all he and Mrs.Forbes had striven for."<sup>36</sup>

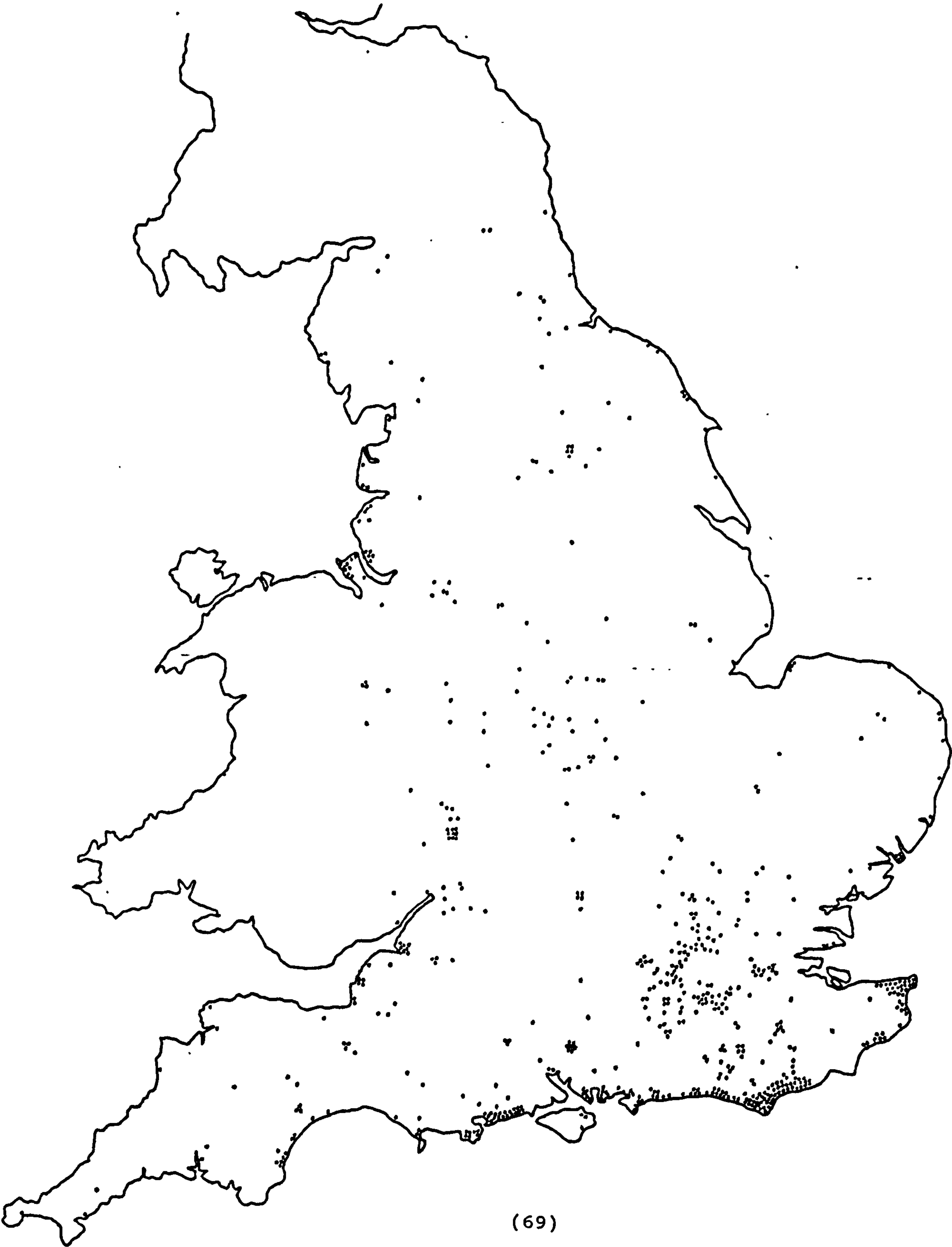
Arthur Harrison wrote that "There were few of us at that time who did not believe that the Preparatory Schools were finished."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> H.D.Martineau, Half A Century of St.Hugh's School, Woodhall Spa (1975), p9.

<sup>37</sup> Harrison (1975); p42.

Location of Prep Schools in England and Wales - 1938





Location of Prep Schools in England and Wales - 1940

After war had begun and before the fall of France  
(Red denotes evacuated schools)





Location of Prep Schools in England and Wales - 1942

After the fall of France  
(Red denotes evacuated schools)





As well as a radical change in premises most prep schools again suffered from a decline in the quality of staff. Most young masters volunteered at the outbreak of war and although for a time schoolmastering was a reserved occupation and those over 30 were told to remain in harness most schools were left only with older men. One Old Sandroydian wrote "All the young masters went off to the war and we were left with the old and infirm. Splendid chaps though most were, most were equally past sell-by date."<sup>38</sup> At Stouts Hill "Owing to the absence of staff, classes were frequently left to themselves."<sup>39</sup>

Again schools had to contend with rationing and the restrictions which war imposed. Again there was heavy loss of life. Of the 66 boys who left South Lodge, Lowestoft between 1924 and 1929 11 were killed in the war.<sup>40</sup> 12% of the Parkside old boys were killed fighting for their country.<sup>41</sup> In 1972 John Graves, a retired Sandroyd master, wrote: "Alas, so many of the best boys of 1929 - 37 were killed in the war so the Nov.11th ceremony I find rather distressing."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.75.

<sup>39</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Stouts Hill, 2/1942. PRO Kew ED109/1751; p3.

<sup>40</sup> Information from Mr.Donald Sewell.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Davis, Purple Passages. Parkside 1879 - 1979 (1978), p128.

<sup>42</sup> John Graves (Sandroyd 1929 - 37) in letter dd.16/3/1972. Sandroyd archives.

### Post-War:

At war's end the prep school world was seriously disrupted. Many schools had been evacuated and even if their original premises existed they were not always easy to return to. There was a significant change in the distribution of schools as a large number decided to stay in their evacuation premises and many more did not re-open after the war. This combined with uncertainty surrounding the future of independent schools in the aftermath of the 1944 Education Act and the socialist atmosphere prevalent in Britain in the late 1940's. The ethos of the prep school now belonged to a more confident pre-war Imperial Britain. Many potential prep school customers had been killed or financially disadvantaged during the war.

Despite all these negative factors the prep school survived. Financial and political pressures led to most schools becoming charitable trusts in the 1950's and 60's. These years, with the increase in private car use, the construction of motorways, decline of the railways and significant improvements in public health, saw the decline of the seaside school. As coastal sites became more valuable and were sold for development prep schools closed all along the South Coast. By 1994 there were only five prep schools in Seaford, Eastbourne and the Isle of Thanet combined - in 1926 there had been 71. These decades also witnessed changes in the curriculum. By 1970 there was no doubt that English was dominant and, thanks to Nuffield Science, almost all schools taught Science.



There have been many other changes since 1940. Boarding schools have moved from urban areas to rural sites but the main growth in numbers has come from day and pre-prep children. While boarding numbers in the 1990s were similar to those of the 1930s by 1994 they only constituted 10% of the prep school population as opposed to around 90% before the war. The typical prep school has changed from a rural boys' boarding school of around 70 boys to an urban co-educational day school with over 200 children. Whereas before the war only about 2% of children aged 8 - 13 attended a prep school<sup>43</sup> in 1994 it is nearly 8%. Over half of the parents sending their children to independent schools did not attend one themselves and public opinion of the education they offer is high. Their growth continues in spite of steady increases in fees which have raced ahead of inflation as staff salaries and school running costs have soared. Prep school teachers are now properly paid and suitably qualified and, with the advent of the National Curriculum and other government legislation, increasingly standardised.

For boarders much of the prep school experience is different. Schools are more homely, corporal punishment is no more and links with parents and home considerably greater. Boarding at prep school is becoming increasingly rare - numbers have declined by 40% in the last five years - but will remain while some parents can continue to afford the benefits they think it bestows or are obliged to travel and work abroad. For many,

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<sup>43</sup> Precise figures are hard to come by. According to the 1932 Report of the Departmental Committee on Private School there were c.350 000 children aged 5 - 14 in private schools and of this number 16 000 attended prep schools. The latter figure seems unduly low given that there were over 500 prep schools at the time with an average of at least 50 boys in each - a total of 25 000 in boys schools alone.

however, the prep school remains tarnished by the popular conception of these schools: a conception emanating from the pre-war period and one, as this study seeks to prove, that is, at least in part, seriously flawed.

## 5: ETHOS

"If you can sit hard-working all the morning,  
And then clear out and play your level best,  
And face a 'row' without a moment's warning,  
And tell the truth and never mind the rest.

If you 'don't tell lies' but keep on sweating,  
And help your lame companions over stiles;  
Then pause, and never find yourself forgetting,  
That they have still to tramp for weary miles.

If you can field all day in boiling weather,  
Then go in last and get run out for duck;  
If you can run all out behind the leather  
And when you're collared never cuss your luck;  
If you can fill each flying schoolday minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of duty done;  
Yours is the bun and all the currants in it,  
And, what is more, you'll be a man, my son."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Master writing in Carmen Strigis (Hillstone School magazine), Summer 1923, p7.



A selection of school mottoes:

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 1. | Virtute et Valore ( <i>With courage and strength</i> )                          |
| 2. | Justum et Tenacem ( <i>Just and tenacious</i> )                                 |
| 3. | Niti Est Nitere ( <i>To strive is to shine</i> )                                |
| 4. | Sto Pro Veritate ( <i>I stand for the truth</i> )                               |
| 5. | Modus et Ordo ( <i>Method and order</i> )                                       |
| 6. | Palma Non Sine Pulvere ( <i>No prize without effort</i> )                       |
| 7. | Ad Majora Vocati ( <i>Called to greater things</i> )                            |
| 8. | Nil Desperandum Christo Duce ( <i>Don't despair with Christ as your guide</i> ) |
| 9. | Pro Ecclesia Pro Patria ( <i>For church and country</i> )                       |

\* \* \*

Ethos is a nebulous term - for spirit is rarely easy to define - but identifying the ethos of the preparatory school is an essential key to the very nature of this institution: much of the reality of life within stemmed from the beliefs which underpinned its foundation. Such a fact was recognised in the period - a visiting preacher once announced:

"In a school there soon grows up a sort of manner of life that quite insensibly affects the boys. It is not so much the traditions, as a sort of spirit of the place which so closely invests you. You can't get away from it and you quite unconsciously absorb it, drink it in. This is it which has made me say, more than once, that what is of chief value in what boys gain here is not so much what he is taught, as what he has caught."<sup>3</sup>

In many ways the ethos of the prep school was that of the public school system as a whole; it was, after all, a component of that system. It did, however, have a subtly different role as it dealt with the entrants and younger members of that system. Pat Knox-Shaw, an influential prep

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<sup>2</sup> Mottoes from: 1. Ascham St.Vincent's, 2. Brightlands, 3. Sandroyd, 4. Malsis, 5. Cottesmore, 6. Brockhurst, 7. Walton Lodge, 8. Aldeburgh Lodge, 9. St.Richard's. I am grateful to Mr.Andrew Brisbane for providing the translation from Latin.

<sup>3</sup> The Wells House Magazine, 12/1921, p777.

school headmaster of the period, once described his view of the role of the prep school in moulding the character of upper class boys:

"For it is we who receive the clay, haphazard lumps of sticky clay, untested, untried; and we put it on our wheel and gradually under pressure and persuasion, with frequent douches of cold water and frequent friendly slappings - gradually it begins to take on some sort of crude shape. Then we pass it on to the next workman and in his skilful hands it grows into more definite form - you begin to see now for what purpose it is designed, and on to the firm outline he puts the little necessary tiddly bits, the design and the precious glaze, till finally when he has completed his artistic work, it goes outside to be fired in the furnace of reality."<sup>4</sup>

This speech provides clues to the prep school ethos. These schools saw their role as extending well beyond the mere provision of an academic education: they were to educate in the broadest possible sense and be of such influence as to leave a permanent mark.

The ethos of the prep school was simultaneously clearly defined and public while being unspecified and hidden. Few schools had thoroughly explored the issue and even those that had only identified components of the ideology they espoused. By combining their 'official' literature with the views and memories of others it is possible to explore the aims and spirit of the inter-war prep school.

Central to this ethos was the formation of character. One headmaster wrote that "The training of character should be the

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<sup>4</sup> Pat Knox-Shaw, after-dinner speech to the Seaford Schools Association, 11/1938. Original manuscript in I.A.P.S. archives.

basis of all education"<sup>5</sup> while a contributor to The Spectator thought it "The real aim of education."<sup>6</sup> School advertisements and prospectuses emphasised the fundamental role of character training: it was "sought above everything."<sup>7</sup> This had been, and continued to be, a primary objective of the public schools but at the impressionable prep school age it assumed an even greater importance. One headmaster held "the theory that a man's character depends almost entirely upon the training he receives when of Preparatory School age"<sup>8</sup> and The Marquis of Normanby wrote "The importance of the Preparatory School Training cannot be too strongly insisted upon. It stamps the character of the boy with an indelible impression."<sup>9</sup> Cyril Connolly observed that "'Character, character, character,' was the message which emerged when we rattled the radiators or the fence around the playing fields and it reverberated from the rifles in the armoury, the bullets on the miniature range, the saw in the carpenters shop and the hoofs of the ponies on their trot to the Downs."<sup>10</sup>

The exact nature of the character training supplied by the schools was rarely specifically described. Instead it reflected the accepted contemporary values as to what constituted sound character. There were several components to this.

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5 Stanley S.Harris, The Master and His Boys, (1924), p27.

6 R.Toote in letter to The Spectator, 7/4/1928, p531.

7 Advertisement in Schools 1937, p592.

8 Nevill Holt prospectus, 1928, p2.

9 The Marquis of Normanby in introduction to Paul King, Preparatory School Ideals (1924).

10 Cyril Connolly (St.Cyprian's), Enemies of Promise (1938), p160.



A boy was expected to become manly. The complicated concept of manliness involved not only the rejection of qualities considered feminine and the severance of links with mother and the domestic world but also the adoption of what were seen as masculine values such as courage and bravery. One was expected to tackle even difficult and dangerous tasks without complaint and to repress the expression of emotions such as pain or anger. A school magazine extolled the "virtue of self-control"<sup>11</sup> while a head wrote that "the aim of every preparatory school should be to teach the self-control, emotional, moral, intellectual and physical, necessary to life in a civilised community."<sup>12</sup> Arthur Marshall wrote of how "It was manly to take hard knocks without blubbing .... It was manly to 'own up' to a misdeed that was going to end in corporal punishment."<sup>13</sup> The experience of a new boy in Toynbee's novel School in Private<sup>14</sup> is typical. He is constantly homesick but only allows himself to cry "hidden under the kind darkness"<sup>15</sup> of his bed. When he finally succumbs in an empty classroom and is found by a sympathetic member of staff all he can say is "'Please, sir, don't tell anyone that I was crying.'"<sup>16</sup> One headmaster wrote of boys "having their rough corners rubbed off"<sup>17</sup> and of the "ability to take a beating."<sup>18</sup> Boys at the

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11 Carmen Strigis (Hillstone), Christmas 1921, p6.

12 Kenneth Durlston, The Preparatory School System, (1926) p14.

13 Arthur Marshall, Whimpering in the Rhododendrons, 1982. This edition Fontana, 1983, p46.

14 T.P.Toynbee, School in Private (1941).

15 Ibid, p69.

16 Ibid, p72.

17 King (1924), p32.

18 Ibid, p27.

Bow School were told of "the spirit of never giving in"<sup>19</sup> while in a sermon at The Wells House they were told:

"A strong, manly character can help a multitude of weaker ones. A determined officer will - and often did in the Great War - simply compel his men, merely by his determination and enthusiasm, to do some great action. One of our own Old Boys won one of the Great War Decorations for such an act. Lukewarmness on his part would have led to disaster. He even shot one of his own men for turning back - and turned what might have been a terrible disaster into glorious victory. In many trials in your life, there is no time for agreement, no room for debate; you have got to do, and do quickly; and it will be your enthusiasm and readiness and resources that will give you success, where lukewarmness or hesitation will only spell failure and ruin."<sup>20</sup>

Boys were prepared according to the Hobbesian doctrine that life was tough and that only the toughest would survive - one headmaster referred to it as the "battle of life"<sup>21</sup>. Another wrote that "Much of our after-life must necessarily consist in doing uncongenial tasks at times not of our own choosing, and only a habit of mental discipline will carry us through."<sup>22</sup> while one more emphasised the importance of "hardening to a sound environment, so that later on it can meet trouble and disappointment as though they were 'straws upon the tide of life.'"<sup>23</sup> Boys were told "Life is not a playground, it is a fierce battleground. Prepare and train yourselves so that you shall quit you like men and be strong."<sup>24</sup> Life at public schools in this period was hardly sybaritic either and boys

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19 Col.Kitching addressing a drill inspection. Quoted in C.D.Watkinson, Bow School, Durham, 1885 - 1985, A Centenary Record, 1986, p25.

20 The Wells House Magazine, 4/1923, p843.

21 Ibid, 12/1921, p778.

22 Alan Rannie (West Hayes), "The Preparatory School" in J.Dover Wilson (Ed.); The Schools of England (1928), p69.

23 St.Ronan's Magazine, 1/1929, p297.

24 The Wells House Magazine, April 1923, p844.

were prepared accordingly. One retired head said you had "got to bring a boy up to be tough. Public schools were not easy places. You had to be able to stand it."<sup>25</sup>

The ethos emphasised the value of hard work and perseverance. 'Keeness' was a popular term as was 'self-reliance' and 'devotion to duty'. At St.Ronan's boys were taught "to do their very best at everything"<sup>26</sup> while at Saugeen the principal objective was to "develop in them habits of industry."<sup>27</sup> Headmasters wrote that they hoped that "their minds well trained would be alert and receptive"<sup>28</sup> and as late as 1959 one of the three beliefs of prep school education as espoused by the I.A.P.S. was "to learn to work hard at tasks which must often prove uncongenial."<sup>29</sup> An Old Boy spoke of "learning to get the most out of yourself."<sup>30</sup> This applied to all aspects of life. Academic endeavour was also valued - if only because the schools had to ensure that boys passed the entrance examination to their public school.

A sound character demanded order and discipline. Boys were expected to develop both and life in school placed a high priority upon these values. Rules, regulations and punishment emphasised order and manly self-control.

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25 Mr.G.Tolson.

26 St.Ronan's Magazine, 9/1925, p277.

27 Advertisement in Schools 1937, p282.

28 Littleton Powys (Sherborne Prep.), The Joy of It, (1937) p155.

29 Foundations, p5.

30 Mr.Richard Vickers (Heatherdown), interview 4/1992.



Such regimentation also served to develop what was seen as another desirable aspect of character: self-sacrifice and a commitment to the group. The I.A.P.S. advised that "boys have first to learn that the individual is less important than the whole."<sup>31</sup> They had "to play for the side and not for themselves ... to feel that spirit of comradeship and good-fellowship"<sup>32</sup> and learn the "great value of corporate life."<sup>33</sup> Schools hoped to develop boys character by "dispersing the natural selfishness of his age and giving him a wider, more corporate outlook"<sup>34</sup> and creating a "sense of responsibility to the community to which they belong."<sup>35</sup> Pride, loyalty and allegiance to ones house, school and country were developed concurrently. Group values were of utmost importance and "To cultivate the individual was to encourage the crank, and a kind of disloyalty to the recognised pattern."<sup>36</sup>

Corporate values were fostered by activities such as team games and these also inculcated the desired characteristic of sportsmanship. 'Play up and play the game' was a favourite motto and there is no doubt that sport was essential to the prep school ethos. Alec Waugh wondered "where ... was learnt the spirit of comradeship and sportsmanship that is, perhaps, the most noticeable quality of the old public school boy."<sup>37</sup> He went on to write:

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<sup>31</sup> Foundations, p5.

<sup>32</sup> King (1924), p32.

<sup>33</sup> Harris (1924), p83.

<sup>34</sup> Reginald Jebb, The Preparatory School (1930), p30.

<sup>35</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Huyton Hill, 6/1939, p2. PRO Kew ED109/2961.

<sup>36</sup> J.H.Simpson, Schoolmasters Harvest (1940), p15.

<sup>37</sup> Alec Waugh, "The Preparatory School" in Fortnightly Review, 8/1922, pp821-822.

"the average small boy is greedy, selfish and acquisitive; and, when one is given out leg-before to a left-hand round-the-wicket bowler who is breaking from the off, the temptation to protest against the umpire's decision is natural. The primitive man, indeed, would have uprooted the stump and walked to the other end of the wicket. Where does one learn to turn straight round and walk towards the pavilion? I think it is at the preparatory school. A small boy knows that he has got to play cricket like a sportsman; he knows that a sportsman does not question the umpire's decision, and he is terribly afraid of doing the wrong thing in the presence of his schoolfellows."<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore many games required physical courage and developed the manly bravery so sought after in a boys character. They also contributed to the formation of fit and healthy bodies: the maintenance of good health was another important objective.

Sportsmanship was a form of the good manners expected of any well-educated man. It was at the prep school that manners were taught and were expected to be taught. The Hadow report had asked all schools "to inculcate good manners, courtesy and consideration for others"<sup>39</sup> and this was very much part of the prep school ethos. Alec Waugh wrote:

"It is at a preparatory school that boys learn manners, courtesy, the proper behaviour in the presence of ladies .... How many small boys will think of opening a door for a lady, of offering her his chair when she enters the room, of apologising to his hostess if he arrives late for breakfast? These are the little things a boy learns at preparatory school, and that he will learn nowhere else; at all good schools a great value is place on these little points of etiquette"<sup>40</sup>

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38 Ibid.

39 Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School (Hadow), (1931) p203.

40 Waugh (1922), p821.

At Abberley Hall as elsewhere the headmaster "hammered in the importance of good manners not mere politeness"<sup>41</sup> and boys were brought up "with a healthy respect for our elders and betters".<sup>42</sup> Obedience, respect for authority, honesty and courtesy all helped comprise the prep school ethos.

A further factor was the class awareness and sense of duty which was inculcated. The prep school was not ashamed of its superior status or of the wealth of its clientele but neither did they brag about it. Instead, they emphasised the sense of duty and responsibility that came with wealth and privilege and sought to equip their boys to become the leaders of the future. One headmaster wrote:

"the original purpose of education in England was to foster an intelligent governing class ... it is precisely this that the public schools, and we in our humbler way, claim to do. We are quite definite in our belief that we are providing the best all-round education in existence, and we point with pride to the way in which our boys have become the admiration, and the administrators, of half the world."<sup>43</sup>

Another wrote of "a readiness to shoulder responsibility"<sup>44</sup> and of "the most important side of the work of the preparatory schools - the early training of the character of the future leaders of the nation."<sup>45</sup> One felt that "Their whole duty is to train leaders for the whole nation in all its activities."<sup>46</sup> A retired head saw his primary role as being "to train leaders

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<sup>41</sup> Gilbert Ashton, Abberley Hall 1921 - 1961, (1980) p28.

<sup>42</sup> Maj.Gen.David Lloyd-Owen in Christopher Richmond, A History of Ashdown House (1991), p27.

<sup>43</sup> Rannie in J.Dover Wilson (1928), p80.

<sup>44</sup> The Chronicle (Brightlands), 1920, p12.

<sup>45</sup> King (1924), p253.

<sup>46</sup> Heddon Court Magazine, No.80 (10/1926), p10.



who knew sufficient to be able to run things."<sup>47</sup> While many schools fostered snobbery others gave generously to charities. All clung to the contemporary belief<sup>48</sup> in the superiority of the White Man, particularly that of the English. One described it as "a world in which all who are English are Christian ... and all who are not Christian are heathen, presumably savages, a world as clearly divided into the two groups of humanity as into land and sea."<sup>49</sup>

Underlying the ethos was a sound basic Christianity and appreciation of right and wrong. A commitment to the Ten Commandments and other fundamental Christian principles ran through much prep school life and it was written that: "the religious background, though simple and unobtrusive, is regarded as an essential factor in a boy's training for life."<sup>50</sup> Schools claimed that religion formed the backbone of their training although the efficacy of their religious training, explored later, was rarely comprehensive.

Alongside character training were a number of other important aspects of the ethos. Most significant among these was the provision of adequate academic, physical and social preparation for public school life was the *raison d'être* of the prep school; it had become an essential preliminary. This included a grounding in the major subjects, the ability to play games, a recognition of rules and submission to authority and a

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47 Col.G.M.Singleton (The Elms), interview 10/1991.

48 Albeit one dented by the horror of the First World War.

49 James Kenward, Prep School (1958), p170.

50 Hillstone Prospectus, 1930s (no pagination).

familiarity with communal life and the values espoused therein. Conformity to accepted values and what was considered proper 'form' was an integral component. Boys who had not attended prep school were rarely able to gain entry to public school particularly after the advent of the Common Entrance Examination at the turn of the century. Similarly, sufficient attention had to be paid to the boys physical well-being. The maintenance of good relations with parents and the financial security of the school also influenced the ethos.<sup>51</sup>

The majority of schools included happiness amongst their aims and objectives but family and caring values assumed much less importance than they do in prep schools of the 1990's. While schools did not seek to make boys unhappy the creation of a happy environment was not at the forefront of most headmaster's minds. This reflected society at the time, a society in which parents and children were distant and the notion that children should 'be seen but not heard' continued to linger.

More progressive schools altered the order of priorities in the basic ethos by emphasising interests other than work and games and aiming more to develop individual potential rather than turn-out a standardised product. In such schools originality and individualism were be encouraged and a greater effort was made to ensure that boys were comfortable and happy.

Schools that did venture to depart from the prevailing and accepted ethos were considered strange and were thereby often

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<sup>51</sup> Precluding, for example, any radical departure from the accepted norm.

excluded by both parents and other schools. They often found it difficult to survive. The conservative nature of the prep schools and their clientele was not conducive to change although, as other parts of this study will reveal, aspects of life within these schools did undergo some transformation within the period. As new generations of parents and administrators brought fresh ideas so the traditions of the prep school were subtly altered to provide the precursors to the values of their modern successors: a greater emphasis on the individual and his happiness and fulfilment.

Essentially the ethos of the inter-war boys' boarding prep school was based firmly upon the development of the boys character. The schools aims reflected the values of the class and society which they served. Prep schools hoped to produce Christian gentlemen: modest, polite, unselfish, honourable, trustworthy, dependable, hard-working, brave, competitive, self-controlled and god-fearing young men. They aimed for a boy who "must show qualities of leadership, devotion to duty, loyalty and keenness in all branches of school life, and a readiness to shoulder responsibility; in short, those qualities which sometimes collectively, but more often individually, have shown themselves in the great pioneers of the British race."<sup>52</sup> Alec Waugh wrote that "The main object of the preparatory school ... is to produce presentable specimens of society, boys who will do the right thing in the right circumstances. And the preparatory school does it admirably well."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> The Chronicle (Brightlands), 1920, p12.

<sup>53</sup> Waugh (1922), p820.



Perhaps their ethos is best summed up by the Forres School Song:

Boys of Forres, sun or rain,  
Struggle on with might and main;  
Do your duty, ne'er complain;  
Faint not! Sons of Forres.

Fear disdaining, play the game;  
Ever spotless be your name;  
Brothers all, to win fair fame,  
Be ye! Sons of Forres.

Let no slacker mar your ranks;  
Give no rotter place nor thanks,  
Idle folly, feeble pranks,  
Scorn ye! Sons of Forres.

Cheerful, steadfast, running straight,  
Stifle envy, malice, hate,  
Falsehood, that would devastate,  
Crush ye! Sons of Forres.

Dally not in work or play;  
Be not glum, but ever gay;  
Weal or woe, ye must display  
Courage, Sons of Forres.<sup>54</sup>

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54 Omnia Studiosa (Forres School magazine), 1931, p10.

## 6: DAILY LIFE

At the heart of the prep school experience lay the daily routine and the physical environment in which the boys lived. Some academic studies ignore this highly important aspect of school life, perhaps perceiving it to be irrelevant or mundane. But to understand the reality of life within these institutions it is essential to have a knowledge of their everyday affairs; it is these which combine to form the prep school experience.

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*"It was a world of bells and tattered books and football boots and crazes and blackboards and piercing screams; of ink smells, chalk-duster smells, smells of mud and mown grass, and the mousey smell of small boys; of draughts, radiators, chilblains, stringy meat and steamed puddings ..."*<sup>1</sup>

An impression of the physical environment such as this forms part of the popular conception but, evocative as it is, it provides little detail as to the reality. Aspects of the physical environment are examined below, linked, where appropriate, to times in the daily routine.

For some old boys their overriding impression of the physical environment is one of hardship, particularly cold. Kenneth More wrote: "we found we had come to stay in a cold house which seemed to have a chill wind scouring it perpetually, as

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil Day Lewis, The Buried Day. Quoted in Nicholas Aldridge, Time to Spare? (1989), p106.

though no doors were ever closed."<sup>2</sup> The buildings themselves, often in coastal locations or large country houses, were not easy or inexpensive to keep warm. Alan Ross recalled: "The house was sprawling Scottish baronial, its lavish grounds on a plateau above a wooded valley. In winter its long corridors made it appallingly cold and I suffered agonies from chilblains."<sup>3</sup> Cecil Beaton wrote: "It was always cold at St.Cyprian's. Whenever possible, I clung to tepid radiators in the corridors. Here I developed the chilblains from which I still suffer agonies. It didn't help matters much when we had to jump into an icy swimming bath every morning."<sup>4</sup> An Old Sandroydian wrote:

"Quite apart from the Cold Baths, the cold at school has not, I'm happy to say, ever been equalled again in my experiences -at any rate indoors. The dormitories were totally unheated. I wore a dressing gown in bed and under that pyjamas, vest and pants, one sweater worn in the normal way, another pushed up with my legs inside the sleeves leaving me vulnerable only through the neck-hole, strategically situated. For ten days or so in the Easter term, wash basins and tooth mugs were liable to be frozen in the morning. There would be one smallish radiator in each classroom and another every fifteen yards or so along the ground floor passage, none upstairs anywhere. They were warm but seldom hot. Each one would have crowded round it what resembled half a rugger scrum. It was a good thing our own homes were not much different. Always there was the threat of the unheated Swimming Baths, into which, without hope of reprieve we dived each day after football."<sup>5</sup>

At Summer Fields the situation was similar. There one old boy

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth More, More or Less, p20.

<sup>3</sup> Alan Ross, Blindfold Games, p81.

<sup>4</sup> Cecil Beaton, The Wandering Years, p30.

<sup>5</sup> Ivor Crosthwaite, unpublished memoirs.



remembered filling ink-bottles with hot water and carrying them around in his pockets. This was not enough to prevent him suffering frostbite on his thumb.<sup>6</sup>

Rigorous physical conditions were part of the ethos of these schools and were necessary to build the desired manly characters in those who experienced them. Children in the period were not expected to be 'coddled' at school and prep schools were sure to comply with parental expectations of a tough, but not unkind, environment.

#### Cold Baths:

For those averse to extreme temperatures the ultimate horror was the cold bath. When writers mention the cold at school their principal memory is of this daily ritual and it is an aspect of prep school life which is prominent in the popular conception.

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Slade in Aldridge (1989), p126.

"I'm all warm in bed, and I don't want to rise,  
The bell begins ringing, and somebody cries:  
'Quick! It's your cold bath! Your turn first!'  
Oh! What a thought! In cold water immersed!

I run down the passage, burst open the door,  
Quickly undress, throw my clothes on the floor,  
And now I am there, the dread moment is near,  
And down my cold spine comes a shiver of fear.

I put on my slippers, and what do I find?  
There's cold water in them, the maid's been  
                                unkind,  
By mistake she has dropped some when filling my  
                                basin;  
There's enough in them now to wash anyone's face  
                                in.

I put one foot over, it slips on the soap;  
It flies away from me, I fall on the slope  
Of the edge of the bath, and slip suddenly in;  
And now it's all over! It's my turn to grin!

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A cold bath was the usual way for prep school boys (and often their masters) to start the day. The Harecroft Hall prospectus advertised "cold baths before breakfast, carefully graded to suit individual boys."<sup>7</sup> The procedure was explained by a Durnford Old Boy: "Every day started with a loud bell which woke us up and straight-away we threw off our pyjamas and ran naked down the passages to the bath room into the floor of which was sunk a small swimming pool - known as the plunge: into this we jumped, summer and winter, into cold water. We went in one end and had to go to the other."<sup>8</sup> At another school:

"Three baths stood next to each other, each one filled nearly to the brim with cold water,

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<sup>7</sup> D.T.Hodson (Boy) in Beauesert Park Magazine Vol.2 No.9 (1932), pp34-35.

<sup>8</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p6.

<sup>9</sup> Revd.M.F.Gibbs (Durnford 1922-25), letter 11/1992.

so that the displacement of a small boy would bring the water level up to the brim. It was forbidden to spill a drop of water over the back end of the bath in the course of lying down, so that one was forced to lean back very slowly and finally to remain lying down for approximately three to five seconds. The act of getting out also had to be conducted in such a way that as little water was spilled as possible. Only sickness or the granting of a privileged state excused the morning bath."<sup>10</sup>

At Brockhurst the form was "in, backs and duck, out!"<sup>11</sup> while at The Pilgrims' an Old Boy remembered: "There we were, in a long line, utterly silent and entirely naked, waiting our turn to enter the dreaded shower bath hissing with freezing water. Meanwhile the Headmaster was most comfortably attired in pyjamas and warm dressing gown calling out NEXT!"<sup>12</sup> Cecil Beaton just recalled "ninety naked and shivering little boys."<sup>13</sup>

These experiences, while differing slightly, are typical of a custom which seems to have been commonplace - although not all schools insisted upon it in the winter. The reasons for this treatment should not be misinterpreted: boys were not subjected to cold baths as a form of cruelty. This was, again, part of the character-building and toughening regime central to the ethos of the prep school. It was not unique to this institution: it also occurred in many public schools and occasionally in the armed forces. Adults frequently washed in cold water when they arose.

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10 Quoted in Arthur Marshall, Whimpering in the Rhododendrons, (1982). This edition Fontana (1983), p30.

11 Lt.Commander S.G.Bloomer R.N. Quoted in J.T.Fleming, A Century off the Examiner (1984), p46.

12 Antony Caesar in John Crook, A History of The Pilgrims' School (1981), p44.

13 Beaton (1961), p30.



Retired headmasters gave different explanations for cold baths. These included the notions that they "woke you up, were meant to be healthy and built up your appetite for breakfast,"<sup>14</sup> as well as helping to suppress homosexuality. Old Boys were less clear:

"Whether the virtues of this frigorific shock were supposed to be medical to harden one against all future suffering or political to enable one ruthlessly to dominate an Empire or simply, akin to flagellation, for the good of one's soul to the greater glory of God, was never elucidated."<sup>15</sup>

A contemporary headmaster wrote: "It is a good thing for them to have a cold bath in the morning. This braces up the whole system and makes them much less liable to catch cold, as their systems will then react to inclement weather conditions with a very much greater chance of success."<sup>16</sup> The primary reason, however, is that they were standard practice as part of the toughening process.

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14 Mr.G.C.N.Grundy, interview 3/1993.

15 Crosthwaite; Op.Cit.

16 Paul King, Preparatory School Ideals (1924), p33.

### A Spartan life:

With cold buildings and cold baths it would be easy to conclude that life at prep school in this period was of a highly Spartan nature. Various old boys described their schools as being "generally a fairly tough place"<sup>17</sup>, "a fairly hard life"<sup>18</sup>, "pretty rugged"<sup>19</sup> and "pretty bleak - you had to be hardy ... boys were sent out in all weathers."<sup>20</sup> Some described grim and austere buildings, drably painted and cheaply furnished. At Arnold House "everywhere were stairs and passages fitted with highly polished brown linoleum."<sup>21</sup> One wrote: "Central heating was a scarce commodity in those days and certainly not for healthy young men. A quick run in single file around the quad, some deep breathing with the freezing air searing our lungs soon put that right and so on to breakfast. 'A little hardship teaches much' was all part of our education."<sup>22</sup>

Information gathered from the Sandroyd survey provided plenty of evidence pointing to a Spartan lifestyle. The dormitories were bare, with wooden floors and windows always open. Teddy bears and posters were not permitted. In winter the ice had to be cracked in the basins and there were regular cold baths. The lavatories were exposed and cold. Corporal punishment was

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17 Sandroyd survey respondent no.5.

18 Mr.Ted Vidal, interview 8/1991.

19 Mr.Jimmy Stow (Horris Hill), interview 7/1991.

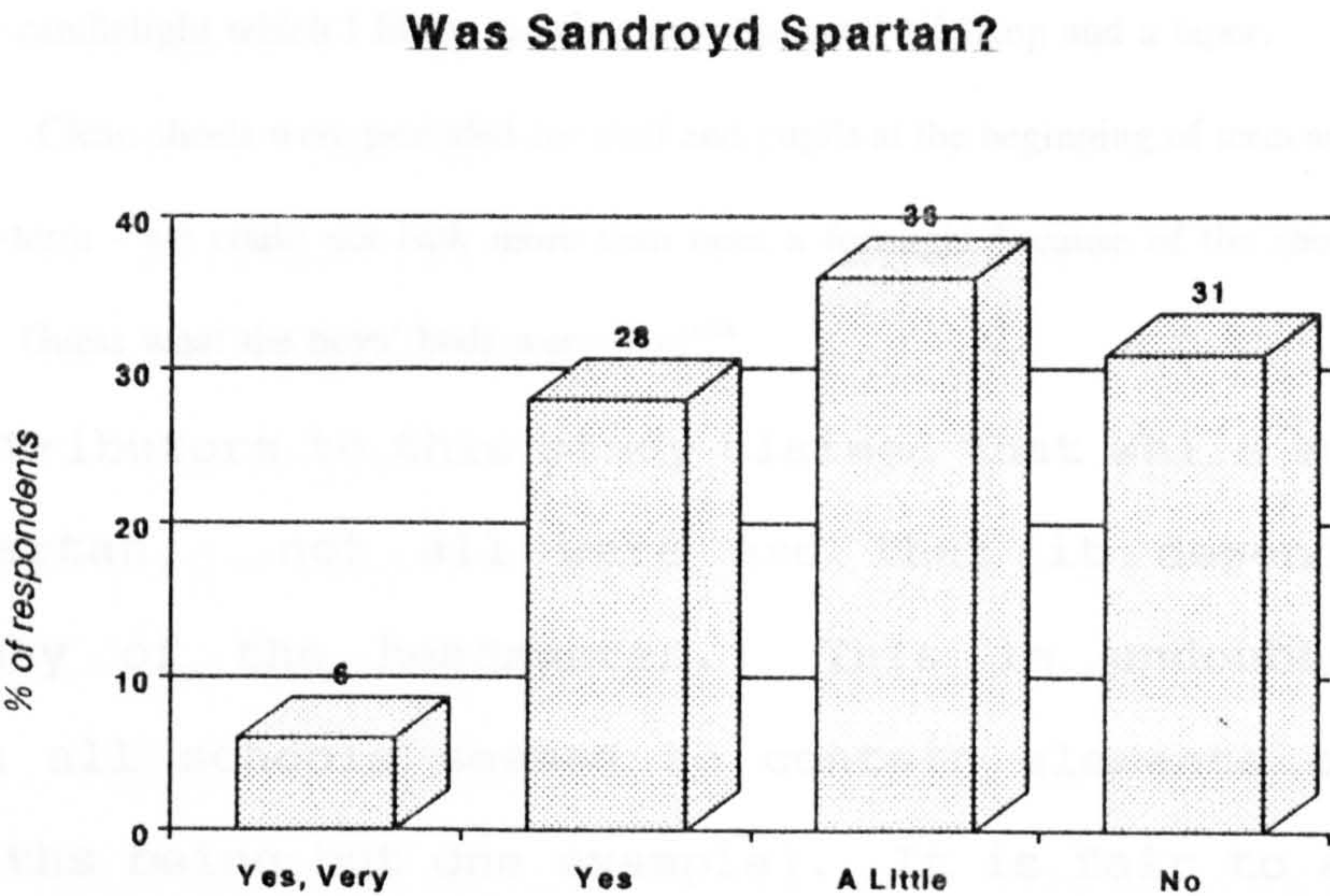
20 Mrs.Sylvia Belle (Aldeburgh Lodge), interview 12/1992.

21 Mr.A.L.P.Carter, letter 2/1993.

22 M.G.Bartlett (Nevill Holt), "1920 and All That" in Condescend, 1986, p23.



frequent. Routines were strict. Games were played with vigour in all weathers. A respondent wrote "I don't remember there being a single soft chair in the place."<sup>23</sup> However, when respondents were asked whether they thought life was Spartan they responded differently. This is shown in the graph below.



The majority agree that there were, at least, Spartan

23 Sandroyd survey respondent no.76.



elements. The problem is that the term is not precise enough and different people have disparate interpretations and impressions. In some respects the conditions were not so much Spartan as primitive. A matron at a very unsophisticated prep school in the 1930s recalled:

"All drinking water was fetched from the village. It was the whole time job of one of the 'house boys' to fill and light all the oil lamps in the school. My boys went to bed by candlelight which I lit by carrying round a small oil lamp and a taper.

Clean sheets were provided for staff and pupils at the beginning of term and again at half-term - we could not bath more than once a fortnight because of the shortage of water. Guess what the boys' beds were like!"<sup>24</sup>

Some contributors to this study claimed that while some schools were Spartan, not all were and that it depended on the philosophy of the headmaster. This is undoubtedly true, although all schools seemed to contain elements of hardship (cold baths being but one example). It is fair to assert that a new generation of headmasters in the 1930s did change some of the harsher aspects of life in their schools.

There is also argument amongst those who experienced the schools. One Old Boy wrote "It was not in the least Spartan. I don't recall cold baths in the morning nor having to sit in cold classrooms and we were always well wrapped up for walks. With the slightest cold one was put off games and treated by the matron."<sup>25</sup> Not all parts of even the harsher schools were permanently cold. It was very rare for classrooms not to be heated and changing rooms were also usually warm.

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<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Betty Dingle. Quoted in Pamela Horn, The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant (1990), p224.

<sup>25</sup> Mr D.H.G.Lyon (The Old Ride/Beauesert Park), letter 11/1992.

It is partly a problem of perspective. In the 1990s we have different expectations when considering lifestyle and the environment in which we live. An Old Boy wrote that while life at prep school may seem bleak from a modern point of view "it was perfectly acceptable at the time."<sup>26</sup>

In comparison with the homes in which many boys lived, prep schools were hardly any different. Large houses were cold in the years before central heating became commonplace. An Old Sandroydian pointed out: "My bedroom at home had no fire or radiator or source of warmth. The dormitories at Sandroyd did."<sup>27</sup> Another wrote: "Cobham with central heating was almost luxurious."<sup>28</sup> One Old Boy noted: "On the whole it was not more Spartan than it was at home, where we had no electricity, with gas lighting, and plenty of linoleum on the floor."<sup>29</sup> As one prep school advertised: it was "sound preparation for future life in the English country house."<sup>30</sup> Compared with public schools of the time many prep schools were considerably more homely. One old boy even went as far as to suggest: "I think, if anything, we were over-cosseted."<sup>31</sup>

Where conditions were unpleasant, boys very rarely complained. It would have been considered outrageous to have done so to the

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26 Sandroyd survey respondent no.75

27 Lord Wigram, interview 8/1993.

28 Sandroyd survey respondent no.20.

29 Mr A.L.P.Carter (Arnold House), letter 2/1993.

30 Nevill Holt prospectus (1928), p20.

31 Sandroyd survey respondent no.77.

school authorities and "it would have been unthinkable to have ever complained to one's parents."<sup>32</sup> When Arthur Marshall protested to his mother about his chilblains and she raised the issue with the matron his mother was told "my chilblains were entirely due to the fact that I was not drying myself properly."<sup>33</sup>

Although commentators may argue about the definition of 'Spartan' it is fair to claim that some aspects of prep school life in this period were fairly tough. The schools were not unaware of this and a degree of physical adversity was considered an important part of their training process. Inspectors noted approvingly that "The temptation to coddle boys is steadily resisted..."<sup>34</sup> and a contemporary headmaster wrote:

"Although children should always be happy, it must be remembered that character is only formed by suffering in this world, and it is, therefore, the greatest possible mistake ... to bring him up 'soft' or in 'cotton wool.' If this be done, he will never be able to face the broader and harder life of the public school..."<sup>35</sup>

Comforts such as central heating were sometimes considered "bad for you"<sup>36</sup> and headmasters were careful not to make school too much like home for then there would be less justification for sending them away to school. Nicholas Monsarrat wrote, "It was then believed that warmth and comfort sapped the character and that austerity was the only thing to endow superior boys

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<sup>32</sup> Contributor to Edward Peel, Cheam School from 1645 (1974), p230.

<sup>33</sup> "Marshall Lore" in The Sunday Telegraph, 30/9/1990. Extracts from Arthur Marshall, Follow the Sun, 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Horris Hill, 7/1929, p2. PRO Kew ED109/1861.

<sup>35</sup> King (1924), p18.

<sup>36</sup> Dr.Peter Horsey (Marlborough House), interview 3/1994.



with characteristics of manliness and leadership,"<sup>37</sup> while Alaric Jacob was told by his father that "those who served the British Empire must submit to a stern apprenticeship before they would be worthy to exercise dominion over palm and pine."<sup>38</sup> A retired master said, "You weren't supposed to cosset the boy,"<sup>39</sup> while a retired headmaster observed that prep schools were "designed to get boys away from mother and make them into men."<sup>40</sup> A contemporary writer warned that "our efforts to make things as pleasant and easy as possible" might lead to schools "failing to train ... [the] future leaders of the nation."<sup>41</sup> We view the conditions from our comfortable late twentieth century lifestyle and tend to forget that before the Second World War life was harder, conditions were tougher and ideas about child-rearing were different. If prep schools were harsh or Spartan then they were not uniquely so. In any case, a prep school which was too comfortable would have been failing in its duty and betraying its ethos.

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37 Nicholas Monsarrat, Life Is A Four-Letter Word (1966), p78.

38 Alaric Jacob in Christopher Norris (Ed.), Inside the Myth (1984), p65.

39 Mr J.R.Thompson (Marlborough House), interview 10/1993.

40 Mr.Jimmy Stow (Horris Hill), interview 7/1991.

41 Anon, "Leadership" in P.S.R., 6/1930, pp138-139, p139.

# Daily Routines at Three Schools:

<u>TEMPLE GROVE</u>	<u>HEATHERDOWN</u>	<u>HORRIS HILL</u>
7.15 Rising Bell	7.10 Rising bell	7.15 Rising bell
	7.30 Cocoa and biscuits	7.30 Early morning school
	7.35 Outdoor exercise	
7.45 Call-over bell	7.45 Bible lesson	
8.00 Prayers	8.00 Chapel	8.00 Breakfast
8.05-8.30 Breakfast	8.15 Breakfast	8.30 All outside - exercise
9.00-10.25 Lessons	9.15-10.30 Lessons	9.00 Lesson
10.25 Break/P.T.	10.30 Medical inspection	10.30 Drill
	10.35-10.55 Break outdoors	10.40 Lesson
	10.55 Milk and biscuits	
10.50-12.15 Lessons	11.00-12.30 Lessons	11.20 Break - all outside
		12.05 Lesson
12.15 Extras and everyone out in playground with football boots.	12.30-12.55 Break	
1.00 Bell for lunch	1.00 Lunch	12.45 Lunch
1.10 Lunch		1.15 Rest - reading in classrooms
1.45-2.00 Sit down	1.30-2.15 Rest on bed	1.30 Change
		1.45-3.15 Games
2.00-2.15 Change	2.30 Change	
2.15-3.15 Games	2.35-3.45 Games	3.15 Change
3.15-3.30 Change	3.45 Change	
3.30-4.00 Free-time	4.00 Milk, bread and butter	4.05-6.20 Lessons
4.00-5.00 Lesson	4.05 Lessons	
	4.45-5.00 Break	
	5.00-6.25 Lessons	
5.00-5.20 Tea	6.30 High Tea	6.30 Summer: cricket/gardening
5.30-6.15 Lesson		Winter: board games
6.20-6.50 Prep	7.00 Chapel	7.00 Prep
6.50 Prayers	7.15-7.45 Extras	
7.00-7.15 Break	7.30 Bed	
7.15-7.45 Prep	7.45 Senior bed time	
7.45 Supper and bed	8.00 All lights out	8.00 Prayers
		8.10 Bed
8.15 Senior bed-time		8.30 All lights out
8.30 All lights out		

Sources: Temple Grove - private book in T.G. archives. Heatherdown - Richard Vickers, Nearly a Century, p86. Horris Hill - Mr. Jimmy Stow, interview 7/1991.

### Food:

Returning to an analysis of the typical prep school day, once the cold bath was over general preparations then began. The boys would return to their dormitories to get dressed. This in itself could be complicated - with ties, braces and Eton collars to contend with. In the less expensive schools they might then have to make their beds but often this was done later by domestic servants. Soon there would be "The harsh clanging of a handbell. The queue to leave the dorm - queue for inspection: hair brushed, hands, nails, ears, teeth and finally 'handkerchief?'"<sup>42</sup> At St. Anselm's inspections by the headmaster "every morning included a handshake, and the reward of a quarter of an hour's rolling the lawn, or sawing of logs in wet weather for any boy with hair unbrushed or tie-pin on crooked!"<sup>43</sup>

Breakfast was rarely then forthcoming, as a glance at the daily timetables of three sample schools reveals. Usually the boys would be expected to sit quietly in their classrooms to finish work, learn their 'rep' (some form of rote learning) or to read. By the 1930s few schools retained lessons before breakfast. At some schools the boys might be expected to parade outside for some form of physical exercise - Swedish drill became increasingly fashionable in this period. The purpose of this was "to stretch their lungs and fill them with

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<sup>42</sup>       Memoirs in Fernden Society archive.

<sup>43</sup>       Martyn Beckett (Ed.), All Our Yesterdays (1988), p14.



fresh air"<sup>44</sup> It was a chance to "burn off some steam so you would be able to sit still in class."<sup>45</sup> A few schools had chapel before breakfast. Finally, an hour or so after having been woken, would come their first encounter with school food.

It is said that 'an army marches on its stomach' and the importance of food to the prep school boy was equally significant. The popular conception of prep school food is one of 'mince and boiled cabbage'. While the quality and quantity of sustenance provided varied widely it certainly encompassed these staples.

The schools themselves always claimed to offer a full and wholesome diet. Streete Court advertised a "Balanced dietary drawn up in consultation with eminent London specialist."<sup>46</sup> Stouts Hill claimed to offer a "diet, which is well varied and balanced, is on a liberal scale and is attractively prepared."<sup>47</sup> Many schools had their own farms or kitchen gardens from which supplies were obtained. Gadebridge Park was proud of the fact that the "Home Farm supplies butter and eggs and milk from pure bred Ayrshire cows; large kitchen garden and greenhouses produce all vegetables and some of the fruit."<sup>48</sup> A headmaster wrote: "Physically, we try to develop sturdy boys by giving them plenty of sleep and wholesome food, whilst

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<sup>44</sup> Mrs. Isla Brownless (Lambrook), interview 5/1992.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Advertisement in Schools 1937, p400.

<sup>47</sup> Stouts Hill prospectus, 1937 (no pagination).

<sup>48</sup> Advertisement in Schools 1937, p340.

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SPECIMEN DIET SHEET.					
	BREAKFAST	BREAK	DINNER	HIGH TEA	SUPPER
Sunday ...	Post Toasties Sausages Tea Bread Butter Marmalade	Cocoa Milk Lemonade Fresh Fruit	Roast Beef Yorkshire Pudding Potatoes, Cauliflower Trifle, Custard	Chicken Ham Roll Tea or Milk Bread, Butter Jam or Honey	Cocoa Milk Soup Biscuits
Monday ...	Porridge Scrambled Egg on Toast Tea, etc.	"	Cold Beef Potatoes in Jackets Fresh Salad Treacle Pudding	Haricot Beans on Toast Tea, etc.	
Tuesday ...	Stewed Prunes Bacon and Fried Bread Tea, etc.	"	Irish Stew Potatoes Carrots Boiled Apples Pudding and Custard	Boiled Eggs Tea, etc.	
Wednesday	Brown Rolls Fish Cakes Tea, etc.	"	Roast Mutton Potatoes Cabbage Rice Pudding Stewed Fruit	Macaroni Cheese Tea, etc.	
Thursday...	Porridge Cold Ham Tea, etc.	"	Steak and Kidney Pie Beans Bread and Butter Pudding	Soup Tea, etc.	
Friday ...	Force Boiled Eggs Tea, etc.	"	Fried Whiting Potatoes Cabbage Chocolate Pudding and Sauce	Sardines on Toast Tea, etc.	
Saturday ...	Porridge Fresh Herrings Tea, etc.	"	Toad-in-the- Hole Potatoes Greens Fruit Tart and Junket	Scrambled Egg Fresh Salad	

T h e     Extract from Dumpton House prospectus, late 1930's.  
experi-  
ence of many boys was rather different. At Cheam the problem  
was one of quantity: "One's ration was minuscule: the  
sausage, for instance, could be the size of a small boy's  
small finger."<sup>50</sup> At St.Cyprian's it was alleged that the

49     Alan Rannie (West Hayes), "The Preparatory School" in J.Dover Wilson (Ed.), The Schools of England (1928), p66.

50     Prinnie (1977), p36.

Wilkes' achieved their profits "by starving the boys"<sup>51</sup> so that they "had to supplement our diet of burnt, tepid, lumpy porridge and slimy galantine by spending our pocket money on extra food."<sup>52</sup> Arthur Marshall wondered why the food "in addition to being inadequate in quantity and usually unappetising to gaze upon, should also be so tasteless."<sup>53</sup> At St.Richard's the food was "extremely poor - the cook had obviously been told to save and save and save."<sup>54</sup> A Temple Grove Old Boy claimed "we were so hungry that we nibbled not only our nails but also the skin from our finger tips!"<sup>55</sup> At other schools boys went to elaborate lengths to obtain additional food. At Penryn these "included high risk expeditions to a local fish and chip shop and ambushing the trolley with the remains of the masters' meals."<sup>56</sup> At Cheam attempts were made to tip one's sausage onto the floor, put your foot on it, and appeal to the butler to serve you another, exclaiming "Oh, Mr.Lord, look what's happened."<sup>57</sup>

At some schools it was the inequalities in food provided that raised the boys' ire. It might be because the staff ate different food to that provided for the boys - David Ogilvy recalls that at St.Cyprian's the Headmaster and his wife "never

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51 David Ogilvy, Blood, Brains and Beer (1978), p9.

52 Ibid.

53 Marshall (1990).

54 Mr.Caspar Tremlett, interview 10/1991.

55 Wing-Commander Cocks (mid-1920's) in O.T.G.Newletter, 1988.

56 Patrick Rose, Nisi Dominus Frustra (1990), pp6-7.

57 Prittie (1977), p36.



ate our food, but those who were privileged to sit next to Mr Wilkes at meals pinched food off the plate"<sup>58</sup> - or that some boys were given better food. At Beaudesert Park "We were reminded of better things at breakfast when, every morning without fail, a large carton of thick cream was placed in front of MacDuff (an Earl). Contemporaries had a share but as a junior I could only stare, like Oliver Twist."<sup>59</sup> Boys whose parents had paid for extra cream or extra fruit were envied by those less fortunate.

It is difficult to determine how many of the complaints made about food are legitimate and how many the result of the fussy tastes of the undeveloped palate. Even the best-fed may still find aspects about which to complain. Given the stress placed upon good food in contemporary advertising it was clearly an issue at the time - probably one linked to the maintenance of good health. While few boys would have dared protest there must have been criticism for a headmaster wrote that complaints about the food are "simply the inevitable sign of ill-breeding."<sup>60</sup> Board of Education inspectors rarely comment on feeding. At Horris Hill they observed, "The dietary is plain and varied. There are no superfluous or deleterious luxuries. The food that is provided is ample and is presented in an attractive form."<sup>61</sup> They were reported as saying, "The

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<sup>58</sup> Ogilvy (1978), p9.

<sup>59</sup> Mr.D.H.G.Lyon, letter 11/1992.

<sup>60</sup> Tom Pellatt, Boys In The Making, (1936) p256.

<sup>61</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Horris Hill, 7/1929, p2. PRO Kew ED109/1861.

dieting and care of the boys was considered universally good."<sup>62</sup> It may be that only particular schools or particular boys experienced poor food. While 7% of Sandroyd survey respondents cited food as an aspect not enjoyed, on a 5 to 1 scale (5 being 'excellent and ample' and 1 being 'terrible and very insufficient') the food received an average overall rating of 3.6. Specific dishes were disliked and the menu could be repetitive but the majority thought it better than adequate. Obviously the food supplied was that suited to bulk preparation and there were usually limitations as to cost. Equally boys were obliged to sample at least a little of everything, especially vegetables, regardless of the intensity of their dislike. Sweets were carefully controlled: they had to be 'handed-in' and were then rationed out on a regular basis. These are factors which could draw complaint from boys but seem justified from a modern and adult point of view. It must also be noted that the general standard and variety of much food eaten in this period seems poor from a modern perspective: not only are our palates more sophisticated but food supplies are fresher, cleaner and of a higher quality.

Despite this, alongside the complaints of poor food are several memories of good food. Some Old Boys simply recalled the wonderful stodginess of school puddings but one remarked:

"I found I have particularly clear memories of the food at Brockhurst .... chops (none of your desiccated, individual items here but complete sides of sheep, roasted whole, carried smoking into the dining room) ... soup of a sumptuousness far beyond the usual, masses of it, thick and sustaining, its surface liberally sprinkled with fried sippets .... Saturdays

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<sup>62</sup> General comment from Board of Education Inspectors and the I.A.P.S. Reported as "Kindly Criticism" in P.S.R. 11/1934, p36.

came in with the rich scent of roasting beef which we had carved at the table as soon as the joints came out of the oven .... massive chunks of home-made fruit cake and cups of tea."<sup>63</sup>

At Harecroft Hall the boys "were extraordinarily well fed"<sup>64</sup> and were able to help themselves to apples and milk.

The dining room was an important feature of most schools. They were generally gracious and tastefully furnished rooms, often panelled and adorned with honours' boards, paintings and photographs. While the food may not have been of a universally superior quality the standard of behaviour expected was certainly high. Staff at Temple Grove were advised:

"Supervision is necessary to ensure ordinary behaviour, e.g. keeping arms off the table, not stretching, but passing food to others, sitting up decently and not reading. If food is refused, it is understood that the boy's name is to be given to Miss Walker for her discretion afterwards. The habit of changing food utensils must be suppressed. Plates must not be slid across the 1st class table at tea, and boys should not rush down the dining hall.

Boys must be polite to maids, and greed must be discouraged."<sup>65</sup>

Table manners were strictly imposed. At some schools requesting that something be passed was deemed impolite and one was obliged to attend to the needs of one's neighbour. Napkins were to be used, elbows kept off tables and knife and fork never waved about. Talking while eating was not encouraged and unruly behaviour could result in having to stand up (sometimes on one's chair so that everyone could see you), leave the room or remove oneself to the 'pig table' in the corner where

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<sup>63</sup> R. Currie, article for The Brock. Quoted in J.T. Fleming, A Century Off the Examiner, p47.

<sup>64</sup> T.D. Penrice, manuscript history of Harecroft Hall, p3.

<sup>65</sup> "Private Programme" in Temple Grove archives, c.1934.



smaller portions or less desirable food was served. At Arnold House "If during the meal someone spilled something, or misbehaved, they were banished to a side table, faced the wall, and served with rice pudding instead of jam roly poly."<sup>66</sup> It was usual for there to be a 'high table' at which sat the headmaster while staff sat at the head of the other tables which were usually arranged by age. The Sister or headmaster's wife ruled over the junior tables. Boys sat at appointed places and the food was brought to the tables by domestic servants who then cleared the dirty plates away again at the end.

A final point to mention is that crazes in food are not unique to the 1990s. Kingwell Court was well ahead of its time when it advertised: "Mr Allan has made a special study of health and diet, and all matters relating to the boys' health and general well-being have his earnest care. No white bread, flour or sugar is used in the boys' diet, wholesome stone-ground flour, brown sugar and honey being used in their place. The diet also includes an abundance of vegetable, salads, fruit and milk."<sup>67</sup> A boy at Sandroyd in the 1920s wrote home telling his mother: "We are having a special sort of food at breakfast now. It is called Bemax, it looks like sawdust, and we take it with our porridge. It makes one heavier, I believe also that it makes one taller. So I want to take it at home with my Force. I recommend it to you. You can take it on

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<sup>66</sup> Mr.A.L.P.Carter, letter 2/1993.

<sup>67</sup> Advertisement in Schools 1937, pp588-589.

a spoon with sugar."<sup>68</sup>

### The Lavatories:

The prep school obsession with regular visits to the lavatory is described later in detail in the Health section. All boys were expected to 'perform' daily and often this was subject to check by matrons or prefects. The time immediately after breakfast was the most favoured for this ritual and in many schools boys would be obliged to go to the lavatory before going anywhere else. An old boy recalled: "a senior boy was present during the whole of this 'ceremony'. He had a school list on which he ticked off everyone's name so as to ensure attendance."<sup>69</sup>

Although by this period most upper class homes had hygienic indoor lavatories, those of the prep school remained unpleasant and often outdoor places. At Sandroyd they were described as "very smelly and dirty"<sup>70</sup> while at Twyford it was not until the 1930's that water closets replaced earth. Arranged in rows, it was common for them to have no doors - presumably so that 'performance' could be checked and there was no opportunity for misdemeanour behind them. This could be acutely embarrassing. Even where there were doors there "was always some other child rapping on the door for entry."<sup>71</sup> The

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<sup>68</sup> Letter from B.Richards. Personal papers, property of Mrs M.Richards.

<sup>69</sup> John Richmond (Sandroyd) in response to a questionnaire sent by boys at Sandroyd to old boys of the school, 2/1991.

<sup>70</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.81.

<sup>71</sup> Prittie (1977), p36.

arrangement at The Old Malthouse was even more rudimentary: there was a "square, stone-built outhouse about 18' by 18', the roof of which was fixed about two feet above the tops of the walls, plenty of fresh air! and around three walls of which were positioned nine earth-closet loos! The first nine arrivals from breakfast took their seats and the remainder of the boys queued at the door."<sup>72</sup> This communal arrangement "gave endless opportunity for chatter and some ragging but it did not strike me, or I think others, as in any way obnoxious."<sup>73</sup> Open lavatories such as these, located outside and well-away from the main school buildings, were even more disagreeable in the cold winter months. Bathrooms have advanced a great deal over the last century; the prep school was not at the forefront of this progress.

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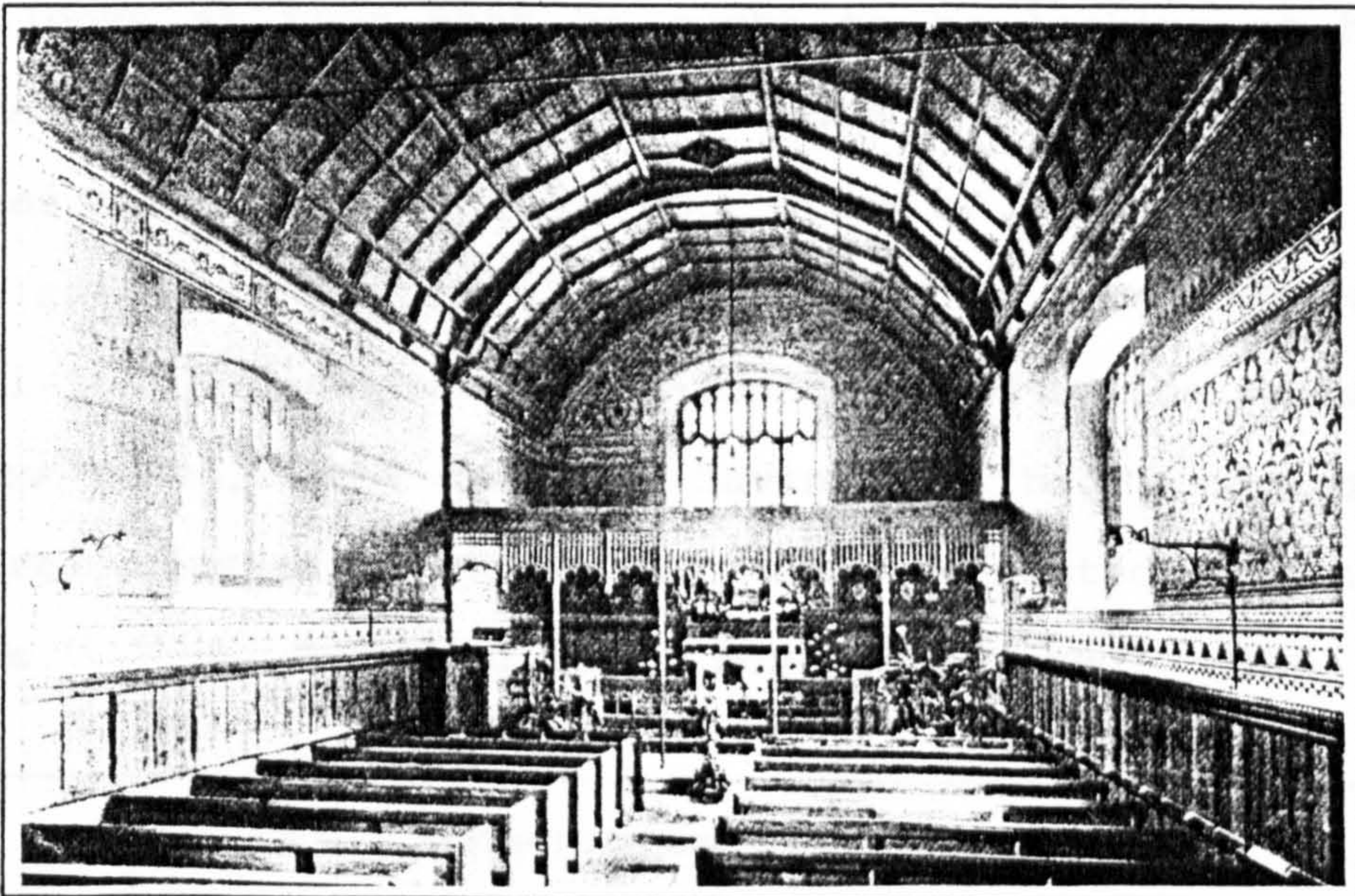
<sup>72</sup> Commander D.R.Duff (1922-26) in letters 11/1992.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



### The Chapel:

At some stage before lessons began schools would have a short chapel service or prayers and a reading. Approximately a third of all prep schools in this period had a chapel of some description. Where one was not available the dining room, hall or main school room was usually used. The construction of the prep school chapel varied. A few schools, located in what were once country houses, were fortunate enough to possess well-equipped 'proper' chapels. Occasionally the parish church was nearby. A number of the wealthier schools built attractive chapels in their grounds, many were built during the period as a memorial to those who fell in the first world war. Some chapels were no more than wooden sheds adapted to the purpose. The Wells House in Malvern secured a tin chapel built for use by missionaries in the third world.<sup>74</sup>



The Chapel at Aysgarth. From Erica Thompson, Out of the Oak.



### The Classrooms:

By about 9.00 it was time for lessons to begin. This first hour and a half to two hour session was the most concentrated and important of the day. At many schools it was devoted entirely to Classics.

The quality of the classrooms themselves varied between schools. In those schools adapted from houses the rooms were usually fairly large whereas, strangely enough, at purpose-built schools the opposite was often true. With classes rarely exceeding 15 in number there was no demand for large rooms but some classrooms had space only for 12 desks, arranged in cramped rows, and no more. It was rare for classrooms to have any form of decoration and the display of work on walls was extremely uncommon. The Headmaster of Malsis wrote: "A classroom's walls are most important, and must clearly remind him who looks at them that he ought to be looking at his work instead."<sup>75</sup> The inspectors commented "Classrooms ... are rather small and often in a poor state of decoration; they are also apt to be untidy."<sup>76</sup> At Aldwick they noted "There is the usual lack of adequate black-boards fixed to the walls."<sup>77</sup> In a few schools the idea of having one big schoolroom with several classes going on at once persisted up until the 1930s.<sup>78</sup> A Durnford Old Boy remembered: "The biggest

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<sup>75</sup> The Malsis Chronicle Vol.5, No.42 (4/1935), p230.

<sup>76</sup> "Kindly Criticism" in P.S.R. 11/1934, p36.

<sup>77</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Aldwick, 10/1934, p2. PRO Kew ED109/6014.

<sup>78</sup> This was not, of course, a prep. school peculiarity. Even today some state primary schools continue the practise of having several classes working together in one large room.

schoolroom was a large L-shaped room and there were three classes going on at the same time! If you were a slow beginner it was difficult to pay attention."<sup>79</sup> Where large rooms had been divided by partitions the problem was not always solved. At Harecroft Hall the inspectors observed: "It is well to note that the partition is anything but soundproof."<sup>80</sup> At Beaudesert Park money tended to be spent on expanding dormitory accommodation rather than classrooms and in the 1920s boys still sat on benches at a large table.<sup>81</sup>

Progress in improving classroom accommodation and facilities was made throughout the period. Hillstone, amongst others, constructed a whole new classroom block while other schools improved the furniture within; the Charney Hall Notes commented "the new desks are undoubtedly a joy, and make a great difference to the look of the classrooms."<sup>82</sup> In 1937 the Pinewood magazine announced: "All ink-pots have been abolished. Every boy has been given, and will be given each term in future, a Platignum Visi-ink Fountain Pen for which three or four spare nibs a term will be allowed. In each classroom a Quink filling station has been placed."<sup>83</sup> This must have reduced the incidence of ink blotted work or the schoolboy trick of flicking ink-sodden blotting paper pellets.

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<sup>79</sup> Revd.M.F.Gibbs (1922-25), letter 11/1992.

<sup>80</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Harecroft Hall, 12/1934, p2. School archives.

<sup>81</sup> Information from Mrs E.Keyte, interview 11/1991.

<sup>82</sup> Charney Hall Notes, 11/1934, p4. Cumbria Record Office, Barrow-in-Furness. Ref.BDS16.

<sup>83</sup> The Blue and Grey, Spring 1937, pp1-2.



At a few schools a classroom housed a school museum. After the war these often contained captured German weapons (Cottesmore boasted "a Bosche machine gun"<sup>84</sup>) in addition to the usual fare of stuffed birds and curious stones. The museum at the Dragon was a Boer war memorial containing items as diverse as an elephants foot, a collection of Indian butterflies and a dinosaur egg from Central America. Nicholas Monsarrat recalled the museum at The Leas, Hoylake:

"One of these class-rooms housed the school museum, and to the dry pervasive odour of chalk was added a secondary smell, which we took to be antiquity. It rose from such items as an albatross, a stuffed crocodile, two capercailzie<sup>85</sup> ('shot by the headmaster'), a python skin, a bow and arrow from some nameless jungle, some pieces of flint bravely labelled 'Ancient Implements', and a South Carolina cotton pod. There was also an old, old armadillo, yellow and scaly, covered with bristles which it was beginning to shed."<sup>86</sup>

#### Break:

Between about 10.30 and 11.00 the boys would have a break from lessons, but this rarely implied free-time. In this period 'free-time' was often construed as idleness. As no prep school wished to be accused of encouraging such a habit most schools scheduled a range of activities to take place in this slot, ranging from medical surgeries to drill practise. At all schools it was compulsory for boys to go outside and usual for them to then be involved in some form of physical activity, if only a walk. The idea was that they should 'get some fresh

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<sup>84</sup> The Cottesmorian, 1920.

<sup>85</sup> A large European woodland grouse.

<sup>86</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p80.

air'. Some schools made this a time for extra football or cricket practice while at others the boys devised unique games based around the school yard or playground. At West Downs "During this boys were not left to their own devices but were required in summer to go for coaching in a cricket 'net' or fielding practice, and in winter to a 'punt-about' with boys standing in a circle and kicking any balls that might come to them as best they could."<sup>87</sup> There might be a few moments in which to visit one's tuck-box. This was a unique piece of prep school furniture. Roald Dahl explained:

"A tuck-box is a small pinewood trunk which is very strongly made ... It is his own secret storehouse, as secret as a lady's handbag, and there is an unwritten law that no other boy, no teacher, not even the Headmaster himself has the right to pry into the contents of your tuck-box. The owner has the key in his pocket and that is where it stays. At St. Peter's, the tuck boxes were ranged shoulder to shoulder all around the four walls of the changing rooms and your own tuck-box stood directly below the peg on which you hung your games clothes. A tuck-box, as the name implies, is a box in which you store your tuck. At Prep School in those days, a parcel of tuck was sent once a week by anxious mothers to their ravenous little sons, and an average tuck-box would probably contain, at almost any time, half a home-made currant cake, a packet of squashed fly biscuits, a couple of oranges, an apple, a banana, a pot of strawberry jam or Marmite, a bar of chocolate, a bag of Liquorice Allsorts and a tin of Bassett's lemonade powder .... As well as tuck, a tuck-box would also contain all manner of treasures such as a magnet, a pocket-knife, a compass, a ball of string, a clockwork racing car, half a dozen lead soldiers, a box of conjuring tricks, some tiddly-winks, a Mexican jumping bean, a catapult, some foreign stamps, a couple of stink-bombs, and I remember one boy called Arkle who drilled an air-hole in the lid of his tuck-box and kept a pet frog in there which he fed on

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<sup>87</sup> Hichens (1992), p54.

### After Lunch:

Lessons continued after break and went on until lunch although some schools had a short session of games or activities at about 12.30. Before lunch the boys were again lined up and inspected: prefects would check hair had been combed and hands washed. At West Downs "If a boy had ink on his fingers he had to scrub away with pumice stone and Lifebuoy soap until his fingers were almost raw."<sup>89</sup> For the boys lunch was normally the main meal of the day and comprised two hot courses.

After lunch the boys were expected to rest while they digested their meal. At some schools the boys went to their dormitories to lie on their beds for half an hour while at others they sat in classrooms or the main hall and read their books. Harecroft Hall advertised: "Twenty minutes rest, in complete silence, is taken after every meal, by every boy in the School. During this period the boys sit motionless [!] in their desks, reading library books, and in this way not only is perfect digestion made possible, and an aggregate of sixty minutes daily rest secured, but there is also inculcated in all the boys, from their earliest school years, the very valuable habit of quiet reading."<sup>90</sup> Such a rest period was in accordance with contemporary medical advice to avoid fatigue: "Some

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<sup>88</sup> Roald Dahl (St.Peter's, Weston-super-Mare, 1925-29), *Boy* (1984/86), pp76-77.

<sup>89</sup> Hichens (1992), p55.

<sup>90</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p8.



period of silent rest, such as lying down with a book, should be ordered daily."<sup>91</sup> This was not a prep school peculiarity: the report of Consultative Committee on The Primary School (Hadow) included the comment: "We agree with the views expressed by many of our witnesses that adequate facilities for rest should be provided for young children, especially after the mid-day meal."<sup>92</sup>

### The Changing Room:

The after-lunch rest was then followed by games [see separate chapter]. From individual numbered pegs in the changing room hung the boys games clothes. In winter these were heavy woollen football jerseys with long sleeves and woollen shorts that extended to just above the knee. Summer cricket apparel was similar to that worn today.

To boys returning from games, especially on a cold and wet winter day, the changing room was a warm haven. By the 1930s it was customary for boys to shower at this stage but it was not always so. At some schools knees and face were scrubbed and the boys changed back into everyday uniform. A Lambrook Old Boy who had attended the school before the Great War wrote in the 1930 Lambrook Chronicle: "Changing rooms such as those attached to the Gymnasium at Lambrook are a modern innovation, and the present generation who delight in every opportunity for washing and baths can have little idea of what their forerun-

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<sup>91</sup> Reginald Miller, "Some Medical Aspects of Boarding School Life" in British Medical Journal 20/5/1933 pp863-6. p866.

<sup>92</sup> Report of The Consultative Committee on The Primary School (1931), p27.





Typical football attire -  
note heavy clothing.  
Sandroyd 1932.

ners had to put up with in this respect."<sup>93</sup> Facilities such as these were expensive and schools were proud of their new facilities. The Hillstone prospectus claimed "No expense has been spared in fitting out the School with the most modern sanitary equipment. In addition to the ordinary bathrooms, a plunge bath and two shower baths have been installed in the changing rooms, for use after football."<sup>94</sup> Some schools simply had a large communal bath - a 'wallow' - into which all boys were immersed. Peregrine Worsthorne was removed from Ladycross at Seaford because of this when he caught impetigo "a disgusting skin disease, associated in those days with slum conditions, and my mother blamed this on the fact that there were no individual baths"<sup>95</sup>

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93 W.F.Bushell in Lambrook Chronicle, 1930, p106.

94 Hillstone prospectus, late 1930's, p10.

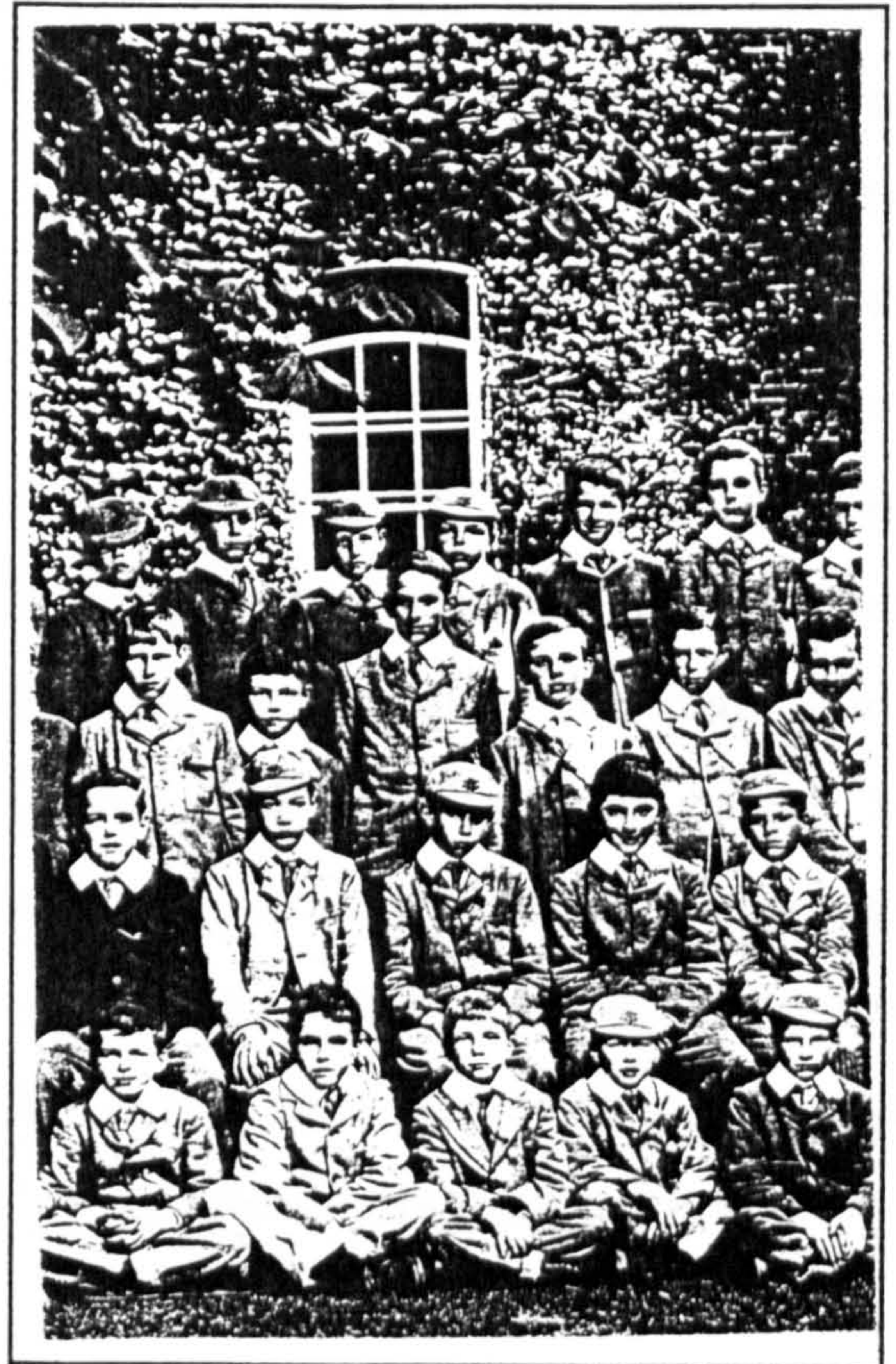
95 Peregrine Worsthorne, "Boy made Man" in George Macdonald Fraser, The World of the Public School (1977), p82.



## Uniform:

By about 3.30 it was time to put school uniform back on. The typical uniform of the prep school boy in the inter-war years differed from that of Edwardian times. It had been usual for boys to wear suits including the 'bum-freezer' Eton jacket but in 1920 The Times wrote that it "does not now necessarily include the Sunday Eton jacket, which is apt to impart a pitifully small and shrimp-like appearance to the wearer."<sup>96</sup> A debate about the Eton collar surfaced in the P.S.R. in 1924. A writer maintained that they should be abolished due to the discomfort they caused the wearer - crowding round the neck, irritation about the shoulders, restriction when stooping over a desk - and the 'dangerous physical effects.'

"That these collars are worn with a view of a training in tidiness is fully appreciated but, seeing what the physical effect is, it is hoped that this analysis will draw attention



A representative sample of prep school boys from a school group around the time of the First World War. Note Eton Collars. Source: Sandroyd archives.

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<sup>96</sup> "Schoolchildren's Trousseaux" in The Times, 11/9/1920, p9.



to the ensuing harm."<sup>97</sup> Boys who were unfortunate enough to have to wear these stiff starched collars and who struggled with the collar studs needed to keep them in place would no doubt have wholeheartedly agreed. Schools began to change although it was not until 1938 that Aymestry announced "With a certain amount of sentimental feeling we have to announce the passing of the Eton collar from our wardrobe."<sup>98</sup>

There were changes in head gear too. The top hat was rarely worn by prep-school-aged boys but some schools insisted upon bowler hats or straw boaters to accompany the Sunday suit. The impracticality and expense of these items resulted in their gradual withdrawal and replacement with felt hats or caps. Some form of hat was always worn. A mother wrote to the P.S.R. to explain why: "some forms of meningitis and other nervous complaints may be attributed to undue exposure to the sun, even when the sun is not very strong; besides in most cases it [i.e. not wearing a hat] is a dirty habit, and would necessitate head-washing every day, which in turn is bad for the hair."<sup>99</sup> Even in the 1950s many schools insisted on boys wearing felt hats in the summer 'to guard against sunstroke'.

In the 1920s prep schools continued to insist on a lengthy and expensive clothes list. The Times wrote "It does seem to include an abnormally large number of flannels, grey for every day and white for grand occasions; also of shorts and sweaters

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<sup>97</sup> A.G.A.Street, "Eton Collars - Should they be abolished?" in P.S.R., 11/1924, pp73-74.

<sup>98</sup> Aymestry Magazine, Easter 1938.

<sup>99</sup> A mother (anon.) in letter to P.S.R., 3/1932, p297.



and jerseys and, above all, of boots, which must not, in ferocious italics, be shoes."<sup>100</sup> The economic austerity of the depression encouraged schools to simplify and cheapen this list. In 1934 Harecroft Hall advertised "The Clothes List has been designed with an eye to comfort and economy, without any regard whatsoever for what is merely conventional .... The entire outfit for a new boy going to Harecroft costs about half of what is usual at most Preparatory Schools"<sup>101</sup> By the late thirties a uniform of cap, tie, blazer and shorts had become the typical uniform.

While photographs of boys in Victorian prep schools show a range of dress, by the inter-war period dress uniformity had been imposed. All boys were expected to wear the same items and a school outfitter was appointed to supply them. The last thing any new boy wanted was to be conspicuous and the boys themselves were quick to tease those who wore

anything different. The Headmaster of Malsis wrote "Any boy who wishes to wear long-trousers in Term-time must first obtain permission from me"<sup>102</sup> and was unlikely to receive it. Shorts were deemed 'proper' for young boys and more practical too:

**UNBEATABLE VALUE**

**LEWIS'S**  
**Boys' "Wilwer"**  
**Yorkshire Union**  
**FLANNEL**  
**SUITS**

Single or double-breasted suits, the jackets with lined sleeves and three outside pockets. Knickers have double seats, belt loops, two brace buttons and two side pockets. All pockets are strongly stayed and an extra piece of cloth for repairing is provided. Made from hard-wearing Yorkshire Union flannel. Fit boys 7 to 15 years.

Shades of grey, navy and brown.

Little Boys' Sizes, 11/9.

Other qualities, 8/9, 18/9.



12/6

A popular style of prep school suit in the 1930's. (Source: Alexander Davidson, Blazers, Badges & Boaters, p39.)

<sup>100</sup> "Schoolchildren's Trousseaux" in The Times, 11/9/1920, p9.

<sup>101</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p13.

<sup>102</sup> The Malsis Chronicle, Vol.4 No.27 (4/1930), p83.



they did not require adjustment for length and were not subject to wear at the knees. The insistence upon smart appearance has been mentioned previously. At Grace Dieu "The only concession was to remove one's jacket and tie for boisterous games."<sup>103</sup> The inspectors, too, were critical of untidiness or sloppy dress because "if not checked, will make itself manifest in their work."<sup>104</sup>

In her study of Ellesmere College Christine Heward<sup>105</sup> identified school uniform as an instrument of social organisation. The masters wore gowns, the boys jackets, the matrons a nurses uniform and the domestics overalls. In the prep school a similar situation existed and graduations of dress between the boys included long trousers for seniors and 'colours' for successful sports players. Standardised clothing not only created uniformity of appearance but also helped promote the general ethos of conformity in these schools. Uniforms had various practical advantages too, helping to ensure that boys wore appropriate clothing. At The Dragon, for example, a distinct games uniform was introduced to prevent lazy boys wearing their ordinary uniform.

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103 Mr.Philip Hebbert (1937-40), letter 12/1992.

104 Board of Education Inspection Report, Saugeen, 6/1930, p8. PRO Kew ED109/1805.

105 See Christine Heward, Making a Man of Him (1988).



### Recreational Facilities:

After games there was often a brief twenty minute period of free-time. Given the widely held notion that free-time encouraged idleness this restriction was unsurprising. Likewise the facilities available for use in moments such as these were very limited, perhaps deliberately so. Few schools had a common room for the use of boys and so consequently they were obliged to spend their time in their classrooms or the corridors. At South Lodge "Life centred around the Big Schoolroom and there ... you spent your free-time, everyone herded together, and the Junior Master attempted to keep the peace."<sup>106</sup> Free-time at Summer Fields in 1919 was even more restricted: "How did the boys employ this time? They jolly well sat at their desks like little gentlemen and read books (or learnt their grammar). Chess, bridge, and ping-pong were not discouraged; but any form of ragging or running was, and any noise was punishable by entry in the Black Book."<sup>107</sup> At Temple Grove staff were advised:

"Games of 'he' etc. are only allowed:-

- 1/ On whole-school days between 12.15 and 1 in playroom, if wet.
- 2/ On half-holidays before and after tea and on wet afternoons in the playroom and on the ground floor except in the changing rooms and dark rooms.

They are not allowed on Sundays.

Skipping is better stopped."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Mr.Donald Sewell, interview 12/1992.

<sup>107</sup> Aldridge (1989), p90.

<sup>108</sup> "Private Programme" c.1934 in Temple Grove archives.

The Headmaster of Temple Grove was obsessed with the proper use of free-time: "A boy had to use his time profitably and sensibly and it was wellnigh a crime for one to be seen wandering about the house or grounds with apparently nothing to do .... [on half-holidays] boys had to write a little note for the master on duty detailing what they intended to do, and it was the M.O.D's duty to see that they kept to it."<sup>109</sup> No doubt parents would have approved of this attempt to ensure that time was used profitably. Restrictions on activities did vary from school to school. One Old Sandroydian actually recalled "the comparative freedom when not in class"<sup>110</sup>, while John Mortimer wrote "We were allowed many liberties: we could bicycle round the town and take boats out on the river."<sup>111</sup> In most schools rooms such as the gymnasium and carpentry shop were out-of-bounds outside specified times. Boys were unable to keep much in the way of toys at school and it was hard to set up games when free-time was so short and space so restricted. When boys did have time to themselves it was often spent outside playing some type of game. The boys at Nevill Holt were a fortunate exception to all this for they enjoyed a "magnificent Hall lounge"<sup>112</sup>. "The view of this lounge after the close of afternoon school with a group of some ten or a dozen boys spread on the floor intent upon games of patience and chess gave an impression of everyday life both

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<sup>109</sup> Gilbert Wheat in O.T.G. Newsletter, 1990 (no pagination).

<sup>110</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.141.

<sup>111</sup> John Mortimer, Clinging to the Wreckage (1982), p20.

<sup>112</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Nevill Holt, 11/1929, p3. PRO Kew ED109/3402.

striking and pleasant."<sup>113</sup> The fact that, in most schools, there was rarely any warm, quiet and comfortable room in which to relax added to the unhappiness of some boys and contributed to the schools' austere image but here again the prep school was simply reflecting its ethos and the demands of its customers. Most boys simply accepted the conditions and got on with life.

Feelings of hardship could be engendered when comparisons were made with conditions in the 'private side' of the house occupied by the headmaster. This was traditionally separated by a door covered in green baize from the rather less luxurious boys quarters. An Old Sandroydian remembered "the sudden contrast in crossing the door between the private part ... from a homely world of chintz and carpets to the bare smelling acridity of the school."<sup>114</sup> At Evelyn Waugh's Llanabba Castle "Dr.Fagan's part of the Castle was more palatial."<sup>115</sup> A few schools were exceptions to this accommodation apartheid. The Wells House had a policy whereby boys had "free access to other rooms, including the Head Master's and Assistant Master's rooms."<sup>116</sup> This was the case at some other schools where the headmaster was a bachelor and literally lived amongst the boys. At Harecroft Hall the boys were not "relegated to any particular portion of it"<sup>117</sup> and at Arnold House the headmaster and

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113 Ibid.

114 Sandroyd survey respondent no.83.

115 Evelyn Waugh, Decline and Fall (1928). This edition Penguin, 1937, p23.

116 Board of Education Inspection Report, The Wells House, 3/1935, p3. PRO Kew ED109/6735.

117 Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p3.



matron actually slept in the senior dormitory, albeit partitioned off from the boys. An Old Downian remembered "Our individual responsibility was assumed, in that we were trusted to share the Head's study, borrow his books, answer his phone and could listen to his records."<sup>118</sup> For married headmasters, particularly those with young children, such an arrangement would have been impractical and, given their close and constant proximity to the boys it would be churlish to complain that most headmasters lived in separate quarters.

Linked to this is the issue of privacy or, more correctly, the near total lack of it. Some boys found this hard to take and, particularly for sensitive boys, the constant turmoil of communal life and the fact that one was within a few yards of another boy for 24 hours a day was a real ordeal. When Wilfrid Thesiger went to St.Aubyn's he found "There was no privacy anywhere; we were always among others, whether in classrooms, dining room or gymnasium, on the playing fields or in the dormitory at night."<sup>119</sup> At Lambrook "There was very little opportunity for a boy to be on his own or quiet and, as RMFR [an Old Boy] said feelingly, there was nowhere to sit except on a hard, hard bench."<sup>120</sup> An Old Sandroydian disliked his prep school days due to "the total lack of privacy - which I didn't know was a privilege."<sup>121</sup> One homesick boy wanted privacy to give vent to his unhappiness:

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<sup>118</sup> Derek Buchanan (1935-41) in The Badger No.57 (Summer 1991), p12.

<sup>119</sup> Wilfrid Thesiger, The Life of My Choice (1987), p66.

<sup>120</sup> Isla Brownless, manuscript history of Lambrook, 1991. Chapter GFC5.

<sup>121</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.63.



"I found my way to the Vinery, as the conveniences at Summer Fields were known. Rather to my surprise they were in a kind of garden; to my consternation they had no doors ... There was no privacy to be found in these privies. My morale sank to my boots. I wandered disconsolately back towards my form room, the tears coursing slowly down my cheeks."<sup>122</sup>

For the majority, however, constant communal life presented no real problems and they relished the contact with their peers.

The inspectors were keen that schools should have a library. Many schools did but, like public libraries of this time, they were not as welcome or interesting as modern versions. The picture below of the library at Sandroyd illustrates this point:



The library at Sandroyd, c.1918. Photograph in school archives.



The selection of books is poor, and, no doubt, of an old and fairly uninteresting nature, and the room itself barely furnished with hard chairs and no carpet. Some school libraries were no more than a bookcase at the back of a classroom. The inspectors were critical of this state of affairs, writing: "There is often an absence of living rooms or library or silence room for reading. Libraries are often not kept up to date with new books or new copies of old favourites."<sup>123</sup> Improvements were made during the period but books and buildings were expensive and, with all income generated by fees, such change could not come quickly.

#### The Evening:

Lessons began again at 4.00 and continued for a further two hours or more, albeit usually with a break for tea. Later there was preparation or 'prep', a time when the boys would be expected to sit down silently at a desk and complete work, assigned earlier, by themselves. This often took place in the big schoolroom and was supervised by a master. To ensure that work was done and done properly any noise or talking in prep was not tolerated and qualified the boy for immediate punishment.

As night fell in many schools gas lamps would be lit. It was only by the 1930s that it became common to have electric light and even then it might be provided by the school's own generator. Arnold House "was lit by Acetylene Gas, generated

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123 "Kindly Criticism" in P.S.R., 11/1934, p36.



by a plant standing outside. On occasion this went wrong, or had not been re-charged. If this happened at prep time in winter, the lights got dimmer and dimmer, and finally went out, to our great delight. Pandemonium broke out, and even the strictest master could do little about it."<sup>124</sup> Bob Wickham recalled that when he became Headmaster of Twyford in the late 'thirties the old Headmaster still carried a paraffin lamp with him because he thought electricity "was so dangerous when it went around the corners."<sup>125</sup> The lack of modern appliances and sophistication is easily forgotten when examining this period. There was no television and the radio only began to be used in the 1920's. The occasional reference in school magazines reminds the reader of the march of progress. In 1927 The Cottesmorian commented "Cottesmore is now a home for motors and we have become quite adroit in avoiding them."<sup>126</sup> The Twyfordian noted "Owing to the constant risk of fire from the sparks thrown out by passing traction engines, Mr Hewlett has felt obliged to remove the beautiful thatch from the roof of his shop opposite our front gate."<sup>127</sup>

By about 7.30 prep had ended but before there was an opportunity to have much free-time the junior boys, at least, would be heading upstairs for bed. First the school would gather for some short prayers and there might then be the opportunity for a small snack and cup of cocoa. At Twyford the boys all then

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<sup>124</sup> Mr.A.L.P.Carter, letter 2/1993.

<sup>125</sup> Revd.R.G.Wickham, interview 11/1991.

<sup>126</sup> The Cottesmorian, 12/1927, p176.

<sup>127</sup> The Twyfordian, 1/1923, p6.

"solemnly shook hands with each member of staff and went up to bed."<sup>128</sup> For a lucky few on the occasional evening, often a Sunday, bedtime was a little later for they were invited to the study where, at Durnford, "Mrs Pellatt read to us an exciting book until T.P. [her husband] appeared at the top of the stairs in his bath towel and said it was bed time."<sup>129</sup> Other boys had to go up to their dormitories earlier when it was their bath night. This was a carefully rostered affair so that schools were able to claim that "all boys now get two or more baths a week, besides the daily douche."<sup>130</sup> Matron was routinely in attendance to wash hair, cut nails and generally scrub boys clean. At The Leas, Hoylake, "There were three baths to each bathroom, and on the door was posted the bath list, intricately timed to allow seven minutes per bath per boy, in six shifts."<sup>131</sup> Boys would be obliged to go to the bathroom to brush their teeth and wash faces before climbing into bed.

#### The Dormitory:

The dormitories themselves were fairly bleak rooms. In the interests of order and cleanliness posters were not permitted and the floors were of polished wood.<sup>132</sup> Not all had curtains and beds were the standard iron frames with regulation

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<sup>128</sup> Revd.R.G.Wickham, interview 11/1991. This was not peculiar to Twyford: Temple Grove was among the other schools where this custom took place.

<sup>129</sup> Revd.M.F.Gibbs (Durnford 1922-25), letter 11/1992.

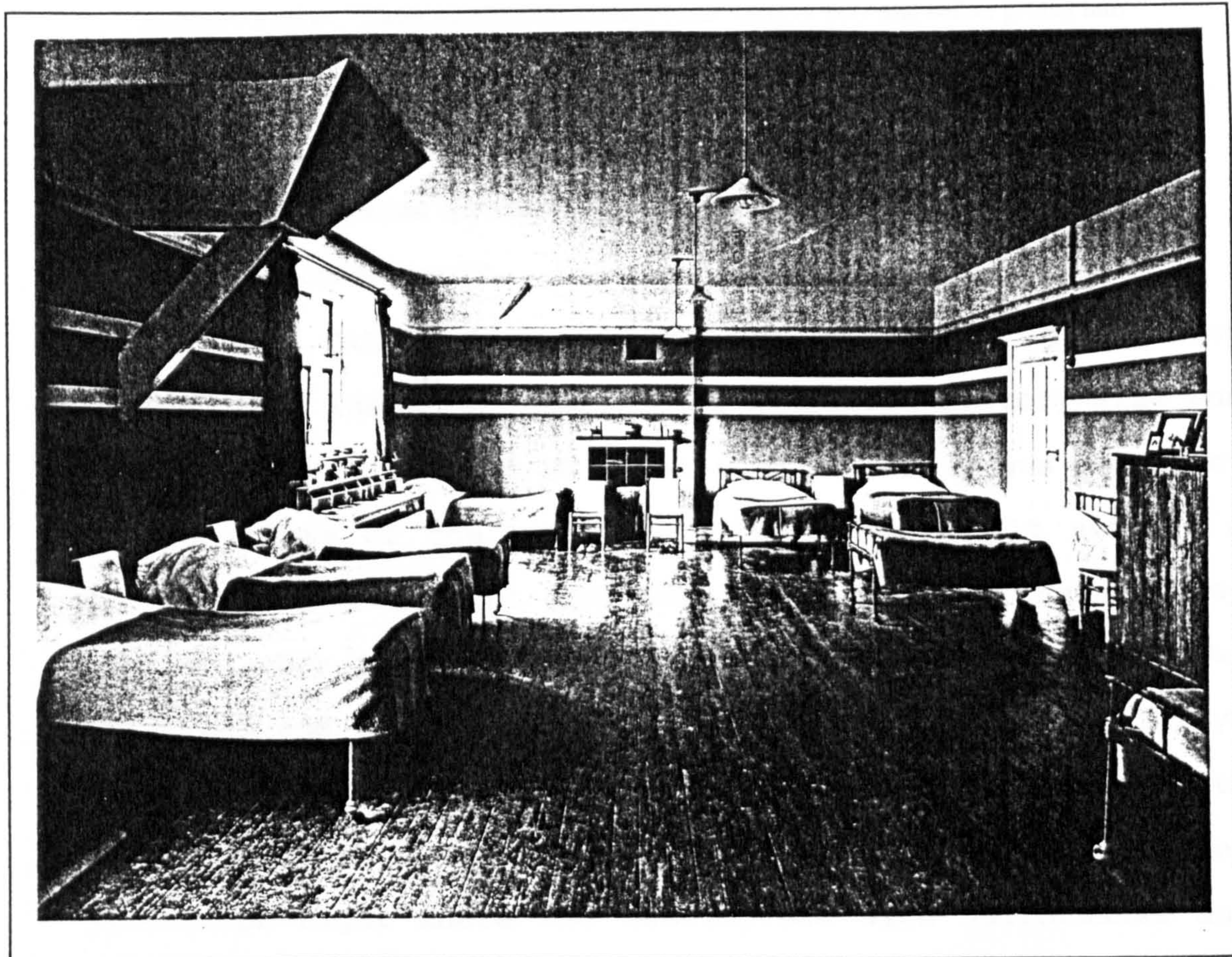
<sup>130</sup> The Cottsmorian, 12/1920.

<sup>131</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p82.

<sup>132</sup> Although Malsis boasted carpets in dormitories as early as 1928 (See The Malsis Chronicle Vol.3, No.22 (7/1928), p49).



blankets.



A dormitory at Sandroyd in the 1920's.

The beds were arrayed in rows around the edge of the room. "Short mats between beds represented your territory. You were not allowed to wander around. 'Dormitory Rules' were pinned up and a blank sheet for recording misdemeanours hung beside. 'Blobs' were recorded here and five resulted in a stripe."<sup>133</sup> Roald Dahl described the dormitories at St. Peter's, Weston-super-Mare:

"Each dormitory had about twenty beds in it. These were smallish narrow beds ranged along the walls on either side. Down the centre of the dormitory stood the basins where you washed your hands and face and did your teeth. Once you had entered the dormitory, you were not allowed to leave it unless you were reporting to the Matron's room with some



sickness or injury. Under each bed there was a white chamber-pot, and before getting into bed you were expected to kneel on the floor and empty your bladder into it. All around the dormitory, just before 'lights out' was heard the tinkle-tinkle of little boys peeing into their pots. Once you had done this and got into bed, you were not allowed to get out of it again until next morning."<sup>134</sup>

The size of Dahl's dormitory was exceptional. In a random sample of 10 inspected schools the average dormitory size was 7 beds and only 17% had 10 or more.<sup>135</sup> The size was dependent on the nature of the building. In purpose-built schools a dormitory size of eight beds was the norm. Nonetheless they remained very public places. Boys rarely had any more than their bed and a chair on which to place their clothes. Toys and teddies were not permitted - these were to be confined to the nursery which should now have been left behind. A framed photograph might share the mantelpiece with hairbrushes and other boys photographs but that was all. Hawtrey's, housed in a series of houses, was unusual in providing a room for each boy. Some boys at Beaudesert Park lived with staff in their cottages until sufficient dormitory space had been built. A few schools had had cubicles in the dormitories but these were dismantled in the period "Owing to the great demand for open dormitories"<sup>136</sup>. These were regarded as superior because "a free circulation of air is secured throughout."<sup>137</sup> It must also have made discipline easier and presumably this demand stemmed from the authorities rather than the boys. There is no

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<sup>134</sup> Dahl (1984/86), p89.

<sup>135</sup> Based on Board of Education Inspection Reports. PRO Kew ED109.

<sup>136</sup> Our Magazine (Newlands, Seaford) No.31 (Easter 1934), p9.

<sup>137</sup> V.Seymour Bryant, St.Piran's, Maidenhead (1926), p50.



evidence of any move toward smaller or more homely dormitories in this period. There is also no evidence to suggest overcrowding. This is never mentioned by inspectors who frequently praise the space in the dormitories. Belmont, Hassocks, even advertised, "Each bed in the Dormitories is allocated 60 sq.ft. of floor space."<sup>138</sup>

Having arrived in his dormitory a boy was expected to change and wash in silence. Clean underwear for the next day would have been laid out by maids and other clothes had to be neatly folded and placed on the chair alongside the bed. These were frequently inspected by prefects and "if one's stool was not up to standard, he was liable to 'take a flier' and kick it over, and one had to try again."<sup>139</sup>

Once in bed there was sometimes a brief opportunity to do some reading. At West



Downs "the only reading allowed at first was the Bible, but one was free to choose which part of the Bible, and the more lurid passages from the Old Testament were often sought out."<sup>140</sup> The beds themselves "were narrow; a cross-lacing of wire took the place of springs, and on this the minimal mattresses sagged like

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<sup>138</sup> Advertisement for Belmont, Clayton Wickham, Hassocks, in Schools 1937, p543.

<sup>139</sup> Hichens (1992), p55.

<sup>140</sup> Hichens (1992), pp55-56.



sheets of cardboard."<sup>141</sup> Shortly before a matron or master came round and ordered 'lights out' boys at many schools knelt beside their beds to say a short prayer. When lights had been turned out they were expected to go to sleep without any talking and to get out of bed without permission was a major offence.

One writer claimed that "A school dormitory is a man's first club, with self-appointed committee and a few difficult members."<sup>142</sup> Life in the dormitory was often mentioned by Old Boys. They re-called misdemeanours after lights out, beatings for being caught talking and surreptitious late-night feasts. All these aspects of the myth did take place although rather less frequently than some writers make out. One always had to contend with unhappy or unpleasant boys, some snored, some wet their beds, some managed to land everyone else in trouble. There were always a few strong characters who asserted themselves. In many schools one boy, sometimes a prefect or from an older year group, was appointed 'dormitory captain' as a means of maintaining order. To be placed in charge of ones peers was not an easy task. The possibilities for misbehaviour were many and given the disruption this might cause it is not surprising that rules were rigorously enforced.

One aspect of the popular conception which does seem to have been true is the coldness of the dormitories. One person

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<sup>141</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p81.

<sup>142</sup> R.C.Robertson-Glasgow, 46 Not Out (1946/1985), p25.

described them as "absolute ice"<sup>143</sup> and many recalled having to break the ice in the basins or their water jugs during the winter terms. H.R.F.Keating wrote, "I slept in the senior dormitory. No heating, of course, we used to slide between freezing sheets at night, and in the morning there would be ice on the wash bowl."<sup>144</sup> At St.Michael's, Tenbury, one had to "snuggle down in bed and keep as many sheets and blankets over you as possible."<sup>145</sup> At Rose Hill the dormitories were fitted with central heating in the mid-1930s but "after the first year they were never put on again because all the boys went down with colds."<sup>146</sup> A retired master said it would have been "heresy" to have heat in a dormitory.<sup>147</sup> It was regarded as unnecessary, too soft and unhealthy, let alone too expensive. Its absence was another component of the character-building process.

The most extraordinary dormitories were the 'open air' variety which a number of schools built during the inter-war period in response to the craze for fresh air. These dormitories were "entirely surrounded by windows which are always kept open except when the weather is too windy."<sup>148</sup> This open air sleeping was said to have "proved its value conclusively during the past ten years and has had a marked effect on the health

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143 Mrs E.Keyte (Beaudesert Park), interview 11/1991.

144 H.R.F.Keating (Beaumont House, 1930's) in Carole Rosen, "The House Where I Grew Up. H.R.F.Keating, crime writer," in The Daily Telegraph Magazine, 18/5/1991.

145 Retired master of St.Michael's College, Tenbury Wells, interview 10/1991.

146 Revd.David Hughes, interview 10/1992.

147 Mr J.R.Thompson (Marlborough House), interview 10/1993.

148 The Downs, Colwall, prospectus, 1934 (no pagination).

and stamina of the boys."<sup>149</sup> At Arnold House the inspectors noted that "Owing to the popularity of this dormitory, boys who are physically fit are selected by seniority for the privilege of sleeping there."<sup>150</sup> One Old Downian recalled "My first dormitory had only one wall! We had rubber sheets to cover our beds there. Sometimes we woke to find snow on them."<sup>151</sup> Strangely, Old Boys did not seem to mind sleeping in these conditions.

Most amazing of all was that boys at The Downs, Colwall regularly slept outside. The Badger of Autumn 1934 reported: "For a fortnight thirty or more seniors slept out in the orchard under the stars and much enjoyed it. Occasionally there was a shower, but we pulled a tarpaulin over our heads and went to sleep again."<sup>152</sup> Following a request from his mother one boy slept outside with a friend in an open-fronted two-person shelter the whole time he was there. He quite enjoyed this even though "in winter the groundsheet would freeze into a solid sheet of ice."<sup>153</sup>

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149 Ibid.

150 Board of Education Inspection Report, Arnold House, Llandullas, 2/1936, p2. PRO Kew ED109/7910.

151 Buchanan, Op.Cit., p13.

152 The Badger No.4 (Autumn 1934), p4.

153 Mr.Henry Glaisyer, interview 8/1993.



## C A R E      A N D      H A P P I N E S S

The popular conception portrays prep school days as unhappy if not miserable. The boys within were supposed to long to leave, the regime was uncaring and the inhabitants unloved. George Orwell claimed that, "it seemed natural that a little boy of eight or ten should be a miserable, snotty-nosed creature, his face almost permanently dirty, his hands chapped, his nails bitten, his handkerchief a sodden horror, his bottom frequently blue with bruises."<sup>154</sup> Yet alongside this must be set contrasting views. The Honourable Anthony Asquith was "never, except for rare moments, anything but happy"<sup>155</sup> at Summer Fields and some Sandroyd survey respondents wrote in glowing terms: "Five years of blissful happiness"<sup>156</sup> and "In many ways it was one of the most enjoyable times of my life."<sup>157</sup> Life at Brightlands was reported to be "so civilised and pleasant."<sup>158</sup>

Contemporary sources support the notion that for most it was a happy experience. Naturally the schools themselves held this view. One prospectus boasted of the "wonderful spirit of toleration and mutual friendship in the School."<sup>159</sup> Outside observers also thought that most were happy. At Aysgarth the

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154 George Orwell, "Such. Such Were the Joys" (1947) in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Eds.), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Vol.IV: In Front of Your Nose 1945 - 1950, 1968, p346.

155 Hon.Anthony Asquith in Richard Usborne (Ed.), A Century of Summer Fields (1964), p115.

156 Sandroyd survey respondent no.29.

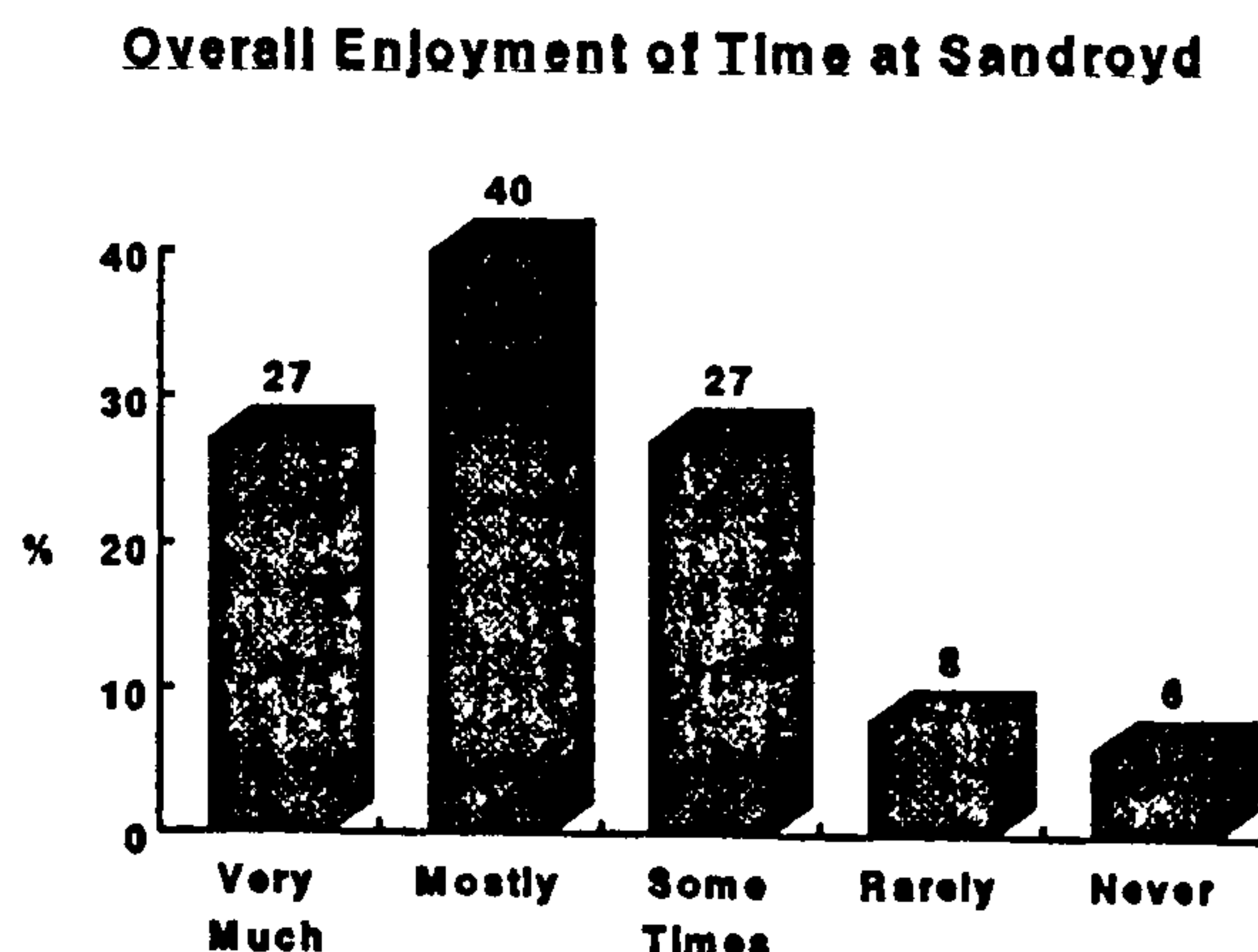
157 Sandroyd survey respondent no.37.

158 Glyn Hardwicke, Brightlands, The Building of a School, 1982, p80.

159 Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p4.

Board of Education's inspectors thought the boys were "obviously very happy in their school life"<sup>160</sup>, at Harecroft Hall all seemed "thoroughly happy"<sup>161</sup>; and at Nevill Holt they were said to "be entirely happy both at work and play."<sup>162</sup> Boys' letters home do not mention unhappiness although this may have been because they were censored or the boy did not wish to admit it. One Sandroydian who had finished his exams and had been granted permission to go home if he so desired wrote to his parents saying "I should like to stay to the end of term .... I think it will be rather fun to stay on."<sup>163</sup>

The problem is one of perspective and individual experience. While some may have been blissfully happy others may have been abjectly miserable. The majority seemed to fall somewhere in between. The graph below shows the responses of Old Sandroydians when asked how much they had enjoyed their prep school days.




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<sup>160</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Aysgarth, 5/1935, p7. PRO Kew ED109/6932.

<sup>161</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Harecroft Hall, 12/1934, p6. School archives.

<sup>162</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Nevill Holt, 11/1929, p5. PRO Kew ED109/3402.

<sup>163</sup> Michael Reynolds (Sandroyd 1929 - 34). Sandroyd School archives.

We assume that children ought to enjoy school and that unpleasant experiences should be avoided. This was not the case in the inter-war period. Obviously total despair was uncalled for but most parents and educationalists accepted that there was 'no gain without pain' and that boarding school was not necessarily to be enjoyed. The ethos of these schools included happiness but it was not high among a list of priorities that placed a higher value on the toughening process of acquiring manliness. As one Old Boy wrote: "It is always hard to get anyone to admit they actually enjoyed their Private School. I'm not sure that, like the Guards' Depot, it was designed primarily to be enjoyed."<sup>164</sup> The response of another Old Boy when asked if his experience had been traumatic expresses a similar view:

"By Christ, and how! It was traumatic being winched from home despite it having been pretty disciplinarian but being pitchforked into boarding school before I was eight ... and then of course the bullying by the other boys when I went there was traumatic. The attitude of the masters and mistresses in general and in particular the head and his ready face-slap, the forceful teaching routines and the impositions - all those things, oh, God! BUT boarding school taught me how to cope with life; if one could survive that and cope with it it enabled you to cope with far worse things - army, war."<sup>165</sup>

To sensitive boys in particular many aspects of prep school life were hard to cope with. An Old Downian wrote:

"If you were strong and tough, well and good.

If you could run to the top of the Worcester Beacon and back without stopping, O.K.

If you could sleep in open air dormitories with the rain and snow coming in on you,

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<sup>164</sup> Ivor Crosthwaite (Sandroyd), unpublished memoirs.

<sup>165</sup> Mr. Charles Jewell (St. Wilfrid's).



again O.K.

I thrived on all this but if you were no good at these activities, I think you had a pretty miserable time."<sup>166</sup>

Like taking medicine, becoming a man was not always pleasant.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that the prep school experience was disagreeable. Indeed for the majority of boys this was not the case (see graph above). Most mentioned aspects of school which they had particularly enjoyed and emphasised how happy they had been. Richard Todd wrote of how he "loved almost every aspect of school life"<sup>167</sup>. Old boys spoke of the company of friends, the excitement of games, fascination of extra-curricular activities, the beauty of the surroundings, the security and the routine and even confessed to enjoying some lessons. If there was much that was unpleasant there was also a great deal to be enjoyed.

If life at prep school could sometimes be tough and happiness was not universally shared, almost all sources agree that boys were well cared for. The lifestyle may occasionally have seemed harsh and punishments strict but, as one Old Boy said, "People rarely died".<sup>168</sup> As detailed elsewhere health was conscientiously attended to and great efforts were made to ensure boys stayed well. If they became unwell then they were well looked after. A retired headmaster at the time wrote of

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<sup>166</sup> The Downs Survey respondent no.21.

<sup>167</sup> Richard Todd (Norwood), Caught in the Act (1986), p47.

<sup>168</sup> Sandroyd Survey respondent no.57.

the need for "considerable care and supervision"<sup>169</sup> given the boys' young age and inexperience. The Board of Education's inspectors commented of one school that "A report cannot do justice to the care and devotion which foster the life of the School and promote the welfare of its boys."<sup>170</sup> One contemporary master even complained of too much care and attention, writing "Here, as at other Prep. Schools, we suffer from much fussiness out of school in one way and another."<sup>171</sup> Only 1% of Sandroyd survey respondents felt that they were not well cared for.

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169 G.B.Alington, "Reflections of an Old Pedagogue upon Preparatory Schools" - manuscript in Summer Fields archives.

170 Board of Education Inspection Report, Belmont (Clayton Wickham), 7/1935, p7. PRO Kew ED109/6011.

171 "Leaves from the Log of a Preparatory Schoolmaster" in P.S.R., 11/1930, p174.



## BULLYING

*"Looking back at my four years at Cheam I am still afflicted by a feeling of nightmare. There was a terrifying amount of bullying. The most usual forms were 'kneeing' at the base of the spine, the pulling of the short hairs above the ears, and arm twisting. The latter was often accompanied by an injunction to 'lick dirt', and the victim might be forced literally to do this. There was also organised beating of the smaller boys by backward louts of thirteen, carried out partly from sheer sadism and partly to see how plucky a child might be."*<sup>172</sup>

Some autobiographies and accounts of life at prep school in the inter-war period carry unpleasant accounts similar to the one given above. Tales such as these have given rise to the widely held conception that bullying was rife in these schools.

Thomas Hughes wrote of the older boys "oppressing the little boys in all the small mean ways which prevail in private schools."<sup>173</sup> It certainly seems that this was an age at which boys could be remarkably unpleasant to each other. A prep school headmaster wrote, "The immature boy possesses to a great or small degree the animal lust for cruelty for its own sake."<sup>174</sup> Alec Waugh observed "They are continually forming

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<sup>172</sup> Pritie (1977), p38.

<sup>173</sup> Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays, 1857. This edition Collins, 1953, p64.

<sup>174</sup> Kenneth Durlston, The Preparatory School System, 1926, p42.

rival gangs; they are on the brink of feuds and jealousies. They side up against one another. Each boy in turn becomes the object of general dislike .... everybody has to put up with a certain amount of persecution."<sup>175</sup> Many of those who experienced prep school agree, writing "Schoolboys are very conventional and quick to gang up on any boy who in behaviour or dress does not conform"<sup>176</sup> and "I am inclined to think that we were very hard on each other as boys, exploiting and ridiculing every weakness or peculiarity."<sup>177</sup> At The Leas, Hoylake, "The ganging up was flagrant and merciless."<sup>178</sup>

Reports of bullying, as opposed to a lack of tolerance which was widespread, are not as common as one might imagine. It seemed to depend on the individual and the school in question. At St.Wilfrid's, "There was some terrible bullying in my earlier days. Bigger boys would punch us to make us run around this gravel square and smack us as we went past. They did it for no reason other than sadism and to be beastly."<sup>179</sup> Hallam Tennyson recalled "bullying in the grey half-light of the dormitories. Boys with mean faces and names like 'Tatham-Watts' or 'Gibson-Gaunt' leering at the wretched new arrival and flicking at him as he ran the gauntlet of wet towels, or picked his way blindfold across an arena of broken glass."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Alec Waugh, "The Preparatory School" in Fortnightly Review, 8/1922, p826.

<sup>176</sup> Thesiger (St.Aubyn's, Rottingdean) (1987), p66.

<sup>177</sup> Revd.Antony Morris in Usborne (Ed.) (1964), p260.

<sup>178</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p90.

<sup>179</sup> Information from Mr.Charles Jewell (St.Wilfrid's, 1928-33).

<sup>180</sup> Hallam Tennyson, The Haunted Mind (1984), p29.



Eustan More was oppressed by a bully called Spedder:

"It was Spedder who dreamed up and practised a number of excesses that accounted for my first feelings of real fear ... One of Spedders little tricks was 'running the gauntlet', when, merely to suit his whim, you would suddenly be compelled to strip to the waist and run round the wash-basins in the middle of the dormitory while all the others stood by their beds and lashed out at you with knotted ties as you went past. A more barbaric method of gratifying Spedder's ego was to submit to his invention of 'stool treatment', in which you lay on the floor on your back with your legs hooked up underneath a piano stool on which Spedder sat whipping your bottom with his own patented thong."<sup>181</sup>

Gavin Maxwell was haunted by the spectre of the bully at Heddon Court: "I can see him now, and hear the scuff of his loose heel-less slippers as he stalked me through the corridors, peering into empty classrooms in the hope of finding me cowering like a scared rabbit behind some open door..."<sup>182</sup>

At some schools there were unofficial school traditions or occasions that constituted a time of mass bullying and were feared by those who were bound to suffer. Peter Luke wrote: "Next Sunday is 'Blub Sunday'. 'Blub Sunday' is the day when everybody pays off old scores. At least that's the idea, but actually it is just an excuse for the bullies to get at anybody. I am told that I am certain to be made to blub on Sunday."<sup>183</sup> 'Pay-day' at Osbert Sitwell's school was similar: this was a day "on which every boy could pay off old scores without fear of rebuke, 'bashing' and being 'bashed' to one's heart content. There were hours of black eyes, missing teeth,

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<sup>181</sup> Eustan More, Oranges At Half-Time, 1967, p18.

<sup>182</sup> Gavin Maxwell, The House of Elrig, 1965, p59.

<sup>183</sup> Peter Luke, Sisyphus and Reilly, 1972, p34.

bloody noses and whirling fists..."<sup>184</sup>

Bullies were not necessarily boys. Some members of staff had a bullying style - one which was no doubt copied by some boys. Gerald Priestland recalled:

"Unfortunately, Bags was a bully. A huge, Churchillian man with a bearish growl, he would lumber into class snarling and jeering, to pick on somebody who had just enjoyed one of life's rare upswings, and knock him down. Sometimes the blow was physical ... nothing could ward off the bellows of 'Nah then! Nah then! Just because you're a birthday boy that doesn't mean you can slack with me!'"<sup>185</sup>

Bullying did not always take a physical form although the threat of violence lay behind much of it. As one Old Boy put it: "There was not much physical ill-treatment but the threat in ones first year or two put one in frequent fear. Victims were few, the bullies even fewer, but the fear was there."<sup>186</sup> Kenneth More remembers being forced to hand over sweets rather than endure a punching from a gang of older boys. On one particular occasion "I handed over one snowball [a type of sweet] as tribute, but the gang insisted I gave them all I had bought. I was so scared that I did so, and so miserable at my own weakness, that I wept."<sup>187</sup> Verbal bullying was often crueler, more incessant and less easily prevented.

There was not a great deal which boys could do to stop bullying. Arthur Marshall wrote "to put on a woebegone face

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<sup>184</sup> Osbert Sitwell, Penny Foolish, 1935, p10.

<sup>185</sup> Priestland (Winchester House) (1986), p30.

<sup>186</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.104.

<sup>187</sup> Kenneth More, More or Less, 1978, p21.



was considered to be a form of sneaking and not even the badly bullied sneaked. There was, in sad fact, literally nobody to whom you could have gone with your troubles."<sup>188</sup> Nicholas Monsarrat explained "To complain would have been unthinkable; this was 'sneaking', the prime crime, and it invited reprisals which would never cease. To cry was 'blubbing', a mistake equally awful and memorable. To fight back would have been very brave, and yet for me it would have been hopeless."<sup>189</sup> It was all very well to be advised 'not to put up with it' and 'give as good as you get' but when faced with the situation few boys felt able to fight back. Some who were bullied simply tried to keep a low profile and stay away from their persecutors, others tried to make friends who would help protect them. Arthur Marshall recalled how a boy named Lenville "thought I must be good at heart"<sup>190</sup> and tried to enlist his support. "His mother came down one summer weekend and, at her son's request, took me out with him for an extremely lavish tea .... Friendliness reigned but when she had gone, Lenville was of course immediately set upon and prominent among the whackers was myself. At one point he turned round and directed a tear-drenched look at me. 'You!' he said. 'And my mother took you out to tea and gave you strawberries!' Appalling guilt is with me yet, grows worse year by year, and will haunt me until the grave."<sup>191</sup> At The Downs, Colwall, one boy was so badly persecuted he took the

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<sup>188</sup> Arthur Marshall, Whimpering in the Rhododendrons, 1982. This edition Fontana, 1983, p94.

<sup>189</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p91.

<sup>190</sup> Marshall (1982), p90.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

ultimate solution and hanged himself in the wood-shed.<sup>192</sup>

The reasons why people bully and why, in turn, others are bullied are too complex to be detailed here. In prep schools of the period anything different, or in breach of an unwritten schoolboy code, was seized upon. To an extent learning to conform and to cope with teasing formed part of the character-building ethos of these schools. When one boy wrote home to his father complaining of bullying and his father then wrote to the headmaster, the headmaster replied; "There is nothing serious at all in what he says about trouble with bigger boys I am pretty sure - he is certainly a bit 'cocky' and bumptious and thereby gets a little sitting on which as you say is inevitable and beneficial."<sup>193</sup> Another headmaster wrote "a certain amount of ragging is an excellent thing; it is good for boys to learn to indulge in a rough and tumble or a wrestle and to stick to it hard"<sup>194</sup> Some forms of bullying were a means of social control, part of "the effort to prevent transgressions of the 'pecking order', conventions to be respected by new boys and juniors. Though this did at first restrict, it did suppress over-noisy and disruptive boys and in this respect was beneficial."<sup>195</sup> Finally, there were some boys who just seemed natural targets; one headmaster was honest enough to admit: "Such boys would be far better off, and stand a greater chance in life, if they were sent to well-

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<sup>192</sup> Sir Alan Hodgkin, Chance and Design (1992), p26.

<sup>193</sup> Letter from H.J.Carson, Belvedere, Hove dd.18/6/1921 to Mr.Burn. Personal papers of M.C.Burn.

<sup>194</sup> Stanley S.Harris, The Master and His Boys (1924), p64.

<sup>195</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.83.



conducted day schools or even educated at home."<sup>196</sup>

Schools and their headmasters hotly denied that there was any form of bullying. Here is an area where institutional perceptions and those of its inmates often differ. It was ridiculous and untrue of one headmaster to assert "bullying and unkindness, of any kind, are absolutely unknown."<sup>197</sup> Bullying invariably existed; the difference was a question of scale. It did not affect the majority of boys. In the Sandroyd survey 9% of respondents mentioned bullying as an aspect of school life they had not enjoyed yet on a subsequent questionnaire where a random sample was asked to rate the level of bullying on a 5(very bad) to 1 (non-existent) scale the average was only 2.2. This would seem to indicate that bullying affected a small number in a large way. Bullying took place where the level of staff supervision was low. Certain areas of school, such as dormitories and lavatories, where boys were not under constant direct supervision, were favoured areas for bullies. This was one problem with more liberal establishments where boys were granted greater freedom from staff control: it also allowed greater freedom for the bully. A contemporary writer claimed, "Bullying by means of physical assault ... is a fast dying vice in preparatory schools. The prevalent system of perpetual supervision renders all but verbal torture difficult of execution."<sup>198</sup> This had been a change from the Victorian period where boys were often left to their own devices, and in

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<sup>196</sup> Durlston, p46.

<sup>197</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p4.

<sup>198</sup> Durlston, p46.

schools where staff were aware of what went on amongst the boys, were vigilant and became actively involved in influencing their behaviour, bullying was significantly lessened. A headmaster noted: "They always need watchful supervision. Sensitive and weakly boys are often made miserable and indeed absolutely ill by teasing and bullying."<sup>199</sup> The position of the headmaster was also important. As the old Headmaster at Temple Grove grew older the school began to fall into decay and bullying increased.<sup>200</sup> Some old boys remembered headmasters with "a salutary detestation of bullying"<sup>201</sup> and where their feelings were clear bullies operated at their peril. When Sandroyd acquired a new headmaster in 1929 he was immediately far harsher than the previous head when it came to bullies - one boy recalled "a ghastly public flogging in front of the whole school ... [after] four boys confessed in public to bullying a boy called Angus."<sup>202</sup> - and an Old Boy noted "the threat of corporal punishment for a persistent thug was effective."<sup>203</sup> Fewer respondents cited bullying as a problem under his regime.

Bullying was an unpleasant problem in some schools for some boys although very few were permanently affected. To an extent bullying was an accepted part of the character-building process but in most schools severe or prolonged persecution was not

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<sup>199</sup> Alington, "Reflections of an Old Pedagogue" - manuscript in Summer Fields archive.

<sup>200</sup> Peter Waterfield in O.T.G. Newsletter, 1988.

<sup>201</sup> Martin Fagg (The Abbey, Beckenham), "Those were the days" in T.E.S., 15/11/1991, p30.

<sup>202</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.76.

<sup>203</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.83.



tolerated. It would be unfair and incorrect to conclude that bullying was a dominant feature of the prep school in this period. It would be equally erroneous to assert that it did not exist at all.

## S E X

The English boys boarding Public School has often been seen as a hotbed of homosexual activity. As Jeffrey Richards has explained: "Homosexuality was deemed to flourish because of the idealisation of Greek culture and society, the enforced intimacy of boys herded together and the lack of outlets for burgeoning sexuality."<sup>204</sup> The popular conception of the prep school does not usually include any direct accusation of homosexual vice but, being in the shadow of their senior schools, the feeling exists that prep schools were the nursery of what many deem unsavoury practises.

The conception often labels prep school masters as homosexuals and/or pederasts. This allegation is investigated elsewhere but whether the boys themselves developed similar tendencies, and the issue of sex in general, requires some illumination.

The over-riding impression is one of extreme sexual innocence. This stemmed not only from the pre-pubescent age of most of the boys but also from the nature of society at the time. As one source said: "Sex was an absolutely closed book. It was never mentioned at all."<sup>205</sup> Boys did not have access to publications which described it, it was never discussed by adults and did not arise in radio programmes. Television was only available, to a very restricted London audience, from 1936. Compared with a modern child, boys at prep school in the

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<sup>204</sup> Jeffrey Richards, Happiest Days (1988), p168.

<sup>205</sup> Mr. Richard Vickers, interview 4/1992.



inter-war years were spectacularly innocent and uninformed. An Old Sandroydian said "I honestly don't remember what it was until I got to Winchester .... we never even said 'fuck'."<sup>206</sup> Gerald Priestland wrote: "Sex ... was to remain a closed book during our days at Brackley ... we simply did not wish to know about girls and were too young for the homosexual affairs which were to be a feature of our public schools .... Farting and defecation were about the limits of our humour..."<sup>207</sup>

Mostly unaware of their sexuality, and oblivious to matters sexual, the boys went about their daily lives without reference to the issue. Nakedness was a part of everyday life. At many schools boys swam naked and showering and bathing was always communal. A new boy was shocked by his first bath night: "Never in my whole life had I seen a naked human being of either sex or any age - here were at least a dozen people with no clothes on at all."<sup>208</sup> Boys stripped for their morning cold bath and when showering after games. Arthur Marshall recalled: "Hot baths, supervised by Matron, were weekly and Friday-nightly and entirely communal. Naked and unashamed and for ever flicking each other with towels, there were no anatomical secrets possible, or needed to be."<sup>209</sup> Curiously, given the frequency with which they saw each other naked, the boys deemed it inappropriate to expose themselves in the dormitory. Gavin Maxwell was told "When you're undress-

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<sup>206</sup> Mr. Peter Ansdell, interview 8/1993.

<sup>207</sup> Gerald Priestland (Winchester House 1935-40) (1986), pp30-31.

<sup>208</sup> Gavin Maxwell (Heddon Court), The House of Elrig, p57.

<sup>209</sup> "Marshall Lore" in The Sunday Telegraph, 30/9/1990. Extracts from Arthur Marshall, Follow the Sun, 1990.

ing and dressing in the dorm or the gym, all the fellows think it piggish if you show anything."<sup>210</sup> Arthur Marshall remembered that when dressing or undressing "intimate regions had to be, at all costs, kept fully draped and hidden. At the slightest hint of a wobbling pink area, or an appendage not normally on view, the done thing was to shriek "Sights" and add the culprit's name..."<sup>211</sup>

While one contemporary headmaster claimed, "The boy at this age is sexless by nature,"<sup>212</sup> it would be wrong to assume that no sexual activity existed. Another headmaster wrote, "It is a common mistake to suppose that sexual problems do not enter into prep school life."<sup>213</sup> As far as the authorities were concerned the principal 'problem' was of masturbation.

Victorian concern with masturbation lingered on into the twentieth century. In 1905 one writer warned "Habits of self-abuse are sometimes acquired in infancy, and wise parents will always be watchful."<sup>214</sup> He went on to claim that "It is not right, nor is it natural, to gratify your passion."<sup>215</sup> The main concern was with the physical damage masturbation was supposed to cause: growth would be stunted, reproductive cells damaged, it would lead to the "entire ruin not only of

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<sup>210</sup> Maxwell, p56.

<sup>211</sup> Marshall, (1990).

<sup>212</sup> Tom Pellatt, Boys In the Making (1936), p206.

<sup>213</sup> Durlston (1926), p49.

<sup>214</sup> Edward Bruce Kirk, A Talk with Boys About Themselves (1905), p17.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid, p27.



the sexual organs but of the body, mind and soul of the youth."<sup>216</sup> It was seen as a sin; a temptation which must be resisted. By the late 1920s opinion was beginning to change but even then a prep school headmaster advised that one must "warn a boy that it is a bad habit to play with himself at all, not because it will drive him mad or seriously injure his growth and health, but because it is better for his natural development that he should learn self-control and decency."<sup>217</sup> While only a small proportion of prep school aged boys were capable of such behaviour schools nonetheless tried to fend away such urges and be vigilant about detection. One reason for a communal lifestyle was to ward off 'nastiness'. A writer claimed "It is so much more natural that boys should have free and open space, and that the baths should be taken openly and in sight of all."<sup>218</sup> It was reckoned that without privacy boys would be unable to engage in self-abuse. Cold baths, fresh air and physical fitness were also thought to help. It was written that, "Athletics go far towards solving the problems of sex, for when exercise is most needed the sexual urge is strongest, and if such exercise is not provided the danger of sexual abuse is increased."<sup>219</sup>

The authorities were less attuned to incidents of immoral practice between boys. One source said of homosexuality that he had "never heard of it in any prep. school in which I

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p34.

<sup>217</sup> Durlston (1926), p58.

<sup>218</sup> Writer in P.S.R., 1915. Quoted in Arthur Harrison, How Was That, Sir? (1975), p71.

<sup>219</sup> Durlston (1926), p79.

taught."<sup>220</sup> However, there is evidence to suggest that it did, at least occasionally, occur. 85% of Sandroyd survey respondents stated there was no homosexuality whatsoever while they were at the school but many then proceeded to disassociate "acts of mutual fiddling"<sup>221</sup> from homosexuality. A retired headmaster wrote "I was very conscious of what was going on underground and, I think, got unduly upset. There is bound to be experimentation in the young and the forces of nature are very strong."<sup>222</sup> One source related how all the school captains were deposed for some kind of "beastliness", and he was told he would have been too had he not been in sick bay at the time, but the reasons were never specified.<sup>223</sup> Harmless experimentation and touching seems to have been about the normal extent of any homosexual experience in a prep school. Obviously with such a sensitive issue it is difficult to be entirely definite about what went on. Sources did reveal such things as "naked lying together in an 11 year old dormitory";<sup>224</sup> a gang "the membership of which entailed 'revealing oneself' in the changing room";<sup>225</sup> and "Potter and me reading in the long grass and he unexpectedly showing me his tiddly."<sup>226</sup> There were various occasions when rather a lot was displayed. Ludovic Kennedy remembered "Bartholomew at the

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<sup>220</sup> Mr.G.Grundy, interview 8/1992.

<sup>221</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.117.

<sup>222</sup> Michael Rogerson, In And Out of School (1989), p77.

<sup>223</sup> Mr.Colin Nicholson (Fernden, 1920's), letter 3/1994.

<sup>224</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.107.

<sup>225</sup> Mr.D.H.G.Lyon (The Old Ride/Beaudesert Park).

<sup>226</sup> Ludovic Kennedy (Highfield 1927-31), On My Way to the Club (1989), p41.



age of eleven startling us all in the showers with a great raft of pubic hair."<sup>227</sup> Gerald Priestland recalled "a certain ribald curiosity about the phenomenon of erection. Sellerman was the champion and could walk the length of the dormitory supporting a bath-towel on his."<sup>228</sup> And another source mentioned "one rather public display of sex. I was in a dormitory of about sixteen boys, and one morning after getting up, one of the boys noticed that the 'dorm' captain remained in bed apparently playing with himself. He then threw back the sheets and the whole dorm gathered round to watch."<sup>229</sup> Full physical contact was almost unheard of:

"I can recall to this day that my first carnal knowledge of another boy took place on my very first night in the small dormitory in the 'waiting house'. Strangely however, physical touching never happened again there - but passionate relationships with other boys did occur on a sort of asexual plane and I remember, during my last two terms, awakening every morning full of joy at the prospect of seeing a certain golden-curly haired younger boy: we could exchange 'hallos' and loving glances and occasionally sat within knee range of each other, but school life was too regulated to allow of closer contact."<sup>230</sup>

An Old Sandroydian recalled being "pinched in the private parts by a boy"<sup>231</sup> but his experience was less than that of Peregrine Worsthorne who remembered a boy who "was extremely precocious sexually, and took an excessive liking to me. But the liking took the form of threatening to strangle me."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Priestland (1986), pp30-31.

<sup>229</sup> Mr.D.H.G.Lyon, letter 11/1992.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.62.

<sup>232</sup> Peregrine Worsthorne (Abinger Hill 1931-36) in Fraser (1977), p84.

The threats continued until a date was fixed. Worsthorne ran away home and "refused to go back to school while X, my kinky admirer, remained."<sup>233</sup> It transpired the boy had been expelled from a previous school for strange offences so he was duly removed and Worsthorne returned. One Old Downian claimed he was bullied sexually, or otherwise sexually interfered with, and this led to the expulsion of two boys.<sup>234</sup>

Relationships with girls hardly existed. The schools were single-sex and their ethos suppressed anything womanly or feminine. Sisters were an embarrassment whose names should not be revealed for fear of ridicule. This was a world of men and "Few were the occasions for meeting the opposite sex ... but one evening a convoy of char-a-bancs arrived at the front door. We were far too young to appreciate the possibilities. GIRLS!!?? Our noses wrinkled."<sup>235</sup> Apart from the occasional dancing 'fixture', girls were objects only to be encountered, and avoided, during school holidays.

#### Sex Education:

*"Far from Sex and its Deviations being a Compulsory Subject, we remained in total ignorance. Almost all of us knew how babies were born. My mother had told me but, at Private School age, I never heard from anyone, contemporary or otherwise, the remotest rumour or whisper as to how this*

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p86.

<sup>234</sup> The Downs survey respondent no.17 (1937-39).

<sup>235</sup> Memoir in the Fernden Society archives.



mysterious state of affairs was set in motion .... We had to rest content with what Mr.Hornby, in a memorable phrase, referred to as "Common, Dirty, Vulgar, Water-Closet Nastiness."<sup>236</sup>

Given the secrecy surrounding the very mention of sex it should come as no surprise to learn that 'sex education' was almost non-existent. The Downs offered "a course in the evolution of sexual reproduction"<sup>237</sup> but "no reference is made at this time to the moral issues."<sup>238</sup> In most schools nothing was said officially until a boys last term, sometimes his very last day. In one prep school novel it was written "The theory at St.Peter's is that none of the boys know how they were born until they leave."<sup>239</sup> It was then that the headmaster would summon leavers to his study for 'the talk'.

How informative this instruction was, and its nature, varied between headmasters. At Summer Fields:

"Mr Alington started the proceedings with prayer. We were then ... given the authentic birds-and-bees story, with much talk, about it and about, all veiled in allegory. There was a dread note of forsakement by God if we did certain things (unspecified); and warnings of Torquemadic agonies if we fell into various (unspecified) temptations. No diagrams, no iso-type sheets were shown; no biological or physiological terms were used. After further prayer, we were cast into the outer darkness of our pubescent doubts, and

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<sup>236</sup> Ivor Crosthwaite (Sandroyd 1924-28), unpublished memoirs.

<sup>237</sup> Hoyland (1943), p27.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> T.P.Toynbee, School in Private (1941), p147.

stood about on the gravel, gazing upon each other with a wild surmise."<sup>240</sup>

Only slightly more explicit was the St.Andrew's explanation:

"In his farewell talk about sex to school-leavers Mr Bull would warn boys not to waste 'it', leaving one with the anxiety that if one did, 'it' might suddenly run out, a terrible prospect. He was rather vague in his description of sexual feeling, making it seem that it came upon one without warning, so that if there was no girl present the chance was lost. It was not clear how often the urge came or what happened if it did not come to the girl at the same time. What Mr Bull did emphasize, though, was that making love was the most wonderful feeling in the world, so that one was left hoping that occasionally the person, the place and the desire would coincide."<sup>241</sup>

Some headmasters, particularly toward the end of the period, did provide a more satisfactory guide. At West Downs it was "frank and factual"<sup>242</sup> and one headmaster always invited questions and had a full and open discussion at the end.<sup>243</sup> He thought the majority "were totally uninformed" but asked "remarkably penetrating questions."<sup>244</sup> Most parents were happy that their sons headmaster should relieve them of this 'burden'. The boys themselves were variously confused, bemused or pleased to have been informed. Ludovic Kennedy remembered, "mulling it over afterwards with Potter and Pemberton, we all agreed it was the most disgusting thing we had ever heard."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Philip Slessor (1919-23) in Usborne (1964), p165.

<sup>241</sup> Alan Ross, Blindfold Games (1986), p82.

<sup>242</sup> Hichens (1992), p90.

<sup>243</sup> Mr.G.Grundy, interview 8/1992.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> Kennedy (1989), p43.



As well as a scanty description of the coital act and murky references to masturbation there was also usually some form of veiled warning about the dangers to come at Public School. One headmaster said "there is a perversion of this act; and it's about this perversion that I want to give you a warning. There are, you must understand, some boys who have ... well, who have prettier faces than others ..." <sup>246</sup> Abuse of smaller boys by older ones did occur in the Public Schools of the period but it is doubtful that most new boys had been sufficiently well-informed at their prep schools to be wary of it.

The subject of sex was taboo in the inter-war years. Consequently boys had little knowledge of what it was all about. Although headmasters gave sex talks they were not overly informative. The authorities were concerned about masturbation but, apart from this, sexual activity among the boys was very limited, extending only so far as relatively innocent childhood acts. Relations with girls were non-existent. There is no substantial evidence to suggest that the homosexuality prevalent in Public Schools developed from practices in the prep school.

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<sup>246</sup>

Mr.C.P.Wilson (Headmaster of Sandroyd) as quoted by Christopher Hawkes in Diana Bonakis Webster, Hawkeseye (1991), p61.

## H E A L T H

One aspect of boarding school life which rarely assumes much importance in the 1990s is the matter of health. The emphasis placed on this by pre-war educators and parents may seem curious in these days of advanced medical science, technology, immunisation and antibiotics. What one must realise is that until comparatively recently the possibility of child mortality was considerably higher than today. In the 1920s a boy at the Dragon died of meningitis while at Aldeburgh Lodge a boy died of appendicitis and the boys subscribed to a memorial fund<sup>247</sup>; at Sandroyd in the influenza epidemic of 1919 a boy, a nurse and the headmaster's wife died and at Horris Hill in the 1930s one pupil died of measles. One Old Boy remembered:

I recall the pall that hung over the school for one complete term, when one boy was isolated in the sick room with diphtheria - a dread disease in those days. We talked in whispers on the landing, and school matches were cancelled."<sup>248</sup>

The epidemic was the most feared affliction. Infectious diseases such as scarlet fever, whooping cough, mumps and german measles not only carried a serious health risk but also significantly disrupted work and games. An antidote to diphtheria was not developed until the late 1930s and in 1935 there were 64,084 cases in the United Kingdom and 3408 deaths (see table below). A quarantine period of at least six weeks was the norm. The Brockhurst magazine of 1922 noted: "The last of our last term's victims was able to leave the Sanator-

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<sup>247</sup> Aldeburgh Lodge Magazine Vol.6 No.5 (Summer 1920) p413.

<sup>248</sup> D.H.G.Lyon (Beauesert Park); letter dd.15/11/1992.



ium just a week before our new term began".<sup>249</sup> An outbreak of glandular fever at Hawtrey's in 1933 led to the closure of the school for a lengthy period.

DEATH RATES P/MILLION AT AGES UNDER 15:					
Source: A.H.Halsey (Ed.), Trends in British Society since 1900.					
Period:	Scarlet Fever:	Diphtheria:	Whooping Cough:	Polio:	Measles:
1911-20	123	437	554	13	838
1921-30	64	298	405	11	389
1931-39	46	290	197	11	217
1967	-	-	-	neg.	8

The infamous influenza epidemic following the First World War killed more people than the war itself. Boarding schools, with children and staff living in close proximity, were particularly hard-hit:

The end of the war in November 1918 was followed by an anxious term - Lent 1919; that virulent type of influenza which gripped the whole country was particularly bad in our part. Boys, domestics and teaching staff all went down with it, and there were some cases which caused much anxiety. I think only three escaped.<sup>250</sup>

The Headmaster of Cottesmore wrote, "The Easter term is dreaded by parents and schoolmasters alike"<sup>251</sup> for it was then that such epidemics seemed most likely. Although one Public School headmaster claimed that "a preparatory school not having an epidemic in the spring term is not doing its job proper-

<sup>249</sup> The Brock, Easter 1922, p4.  
<sup>250</sup> The Seagull (Seascale Preparatory School); 6/1948, p7.  
<sup>251</sup> The Cottesmorian, 7/1924, p33.

ly"<sup>252</sup> most of those working in the prep school were very keen to maintain good health. The strain and stress imposed on a relatively small number of adults required to care for a larger number of sick children was quite considerable. The following extract from the history of Abberley Hall serves as some illustration:

The Easter term of 1936 will long be remembered by both the boys and staff of that time for a very severe and virulent epidemic of measles and whooping cough - a dreaded combination in the days when there were no antibiotics .... All the most severe cases of measles occurred in the third batch, of whom five boys were seriously ill and we deeply regret to say that one, who had both diseases, died .... It was indeed a nightmare of a time and ... the strain and anxiety of being responsible for the health of so many young children, a few of whom were dangerously ill, needs no emphasising.<sup>253</sup>

Almost all school magazines are full of references to the health of the school in the preceding term, expressing gratitude for good health or dismay at the extent of affliction. Typical is this entry from the 1925 Cottesmorian: "A foul plague yclept Mumps descended upon the land and smote us to such effect that our History experts must have been taken back to 1666 or the Black Death for a parallel."<sup>254</sup>

The importance of health factors in the location of schools, particularly those situated on coastal sites or Spa towns has already been identified. Given the importance of good health in the smooth running of a school, the risk posed by disease and parental concern about their children's well-being, it is

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<sup>252</sup> Quoted in the Lambrook Chronicle of 1938. Reproduced in Isla Brownless' unpublished manuscript history of Lambrook, 1991, chapter GFC7.

<sup>253</sup> Gilbert Ashton; Abberley Hall 1921 - 1961 (1980), p79.

<sup>254</sup> The Cottesmorian 7/1925, p141.



not surprising that many schools made great play of their environment. Comments such as these are typical of claims made in prospectuses and advertising of the period:

"Penzance has the mildest and most equable climate in Great Britain. From November to March it is warmer than the South of France, while many sub-tropical plants flourish in the open. It is, therefore, especially recommended by doctors for delicate boys and those from the East."<sup>255</sup>

"The climate is an ideal one for boys, neither too bracing nor relaxing, and is particularly suited for those coming from India and abroad."<sup>256</sup>

"The soil is sandy and the climate is bracing, and is recommended by doctors as being particularly healthy for children."<sup>257</sup>

"the combination of sea and mountain air makes the district a particularly healthy one for delicate boys, who go ahead in a remarkable way from their first week at the School, putting on weight rapidly."<sup>258</sup>

There are many examples of boys being moved because a more healthy location was seen as the answer to their problems. At least six boys were removed from Sandroyd in the period to coastal schools for this reason, usually on the doctor's recommendation.<sup>259</sup> Summer Fields, St.Leonard's, an offshoot of the famous Oxford prep school, was specifically founded for weak and delicate boys. Indeed, a writer in the British Medical Journal stated: "As many children are sent to boarding

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<sup>255</sup> Advertisement for St.Erbyn's in Schools 1937, p245.

<sup>256</sup> Advertisement for Seafeld Park, Fareham in Schools 1937, p318.

<sup>257</sup> Advertisement for The Knoll, Woburn Sands in Ibid; p230.

<sup>258</sup> Harecroft Hall Prospectus, 1934, p1.

<sup>259</sup> A typical example is that of William Agar: on his record card is written "Condemned by Dr Bevan to Broadstairs schools with 6 weeks in Switzerland first." Sandroyd archives.

school primarily for their health it is only common sense to choose the best climate."<sup>260</sup> Coastal air probably helped those suffering from asthma<sup>261</sup> and may have reduced the frequency of coughing - an affliction feared for its connection with illnesses such as tuberculosis. Clay soil was associated, incorrectly, with colds and thus well-draining soil was considered desirable. The poor air quality and possibly higher allergy counts deemed the valley to be a poor prep school location.<sup>262</sup>

Alongside their physical location, schools often made play out of the facilities they offered in connection with health. Hillstone's prospectus claimed that "No expense has been spared in fitting out the School with the most modern sanitary equipment."<sup>263</sup> and most had built sanatoria, often large buildings in the grounds.<sup>264</sup> Schools in Eastbourne has a special ward reserved for them in the local Sanatorium. Photographs in prospectuses of bathrooms and lavatory facilities emphasised the modernity of the schools sanitary arrangements.

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<sup>260</sup> Reginald Miller "Some Medical Aspects of Boarding School Life" in British Medical Journal 20/5/1933, p864.

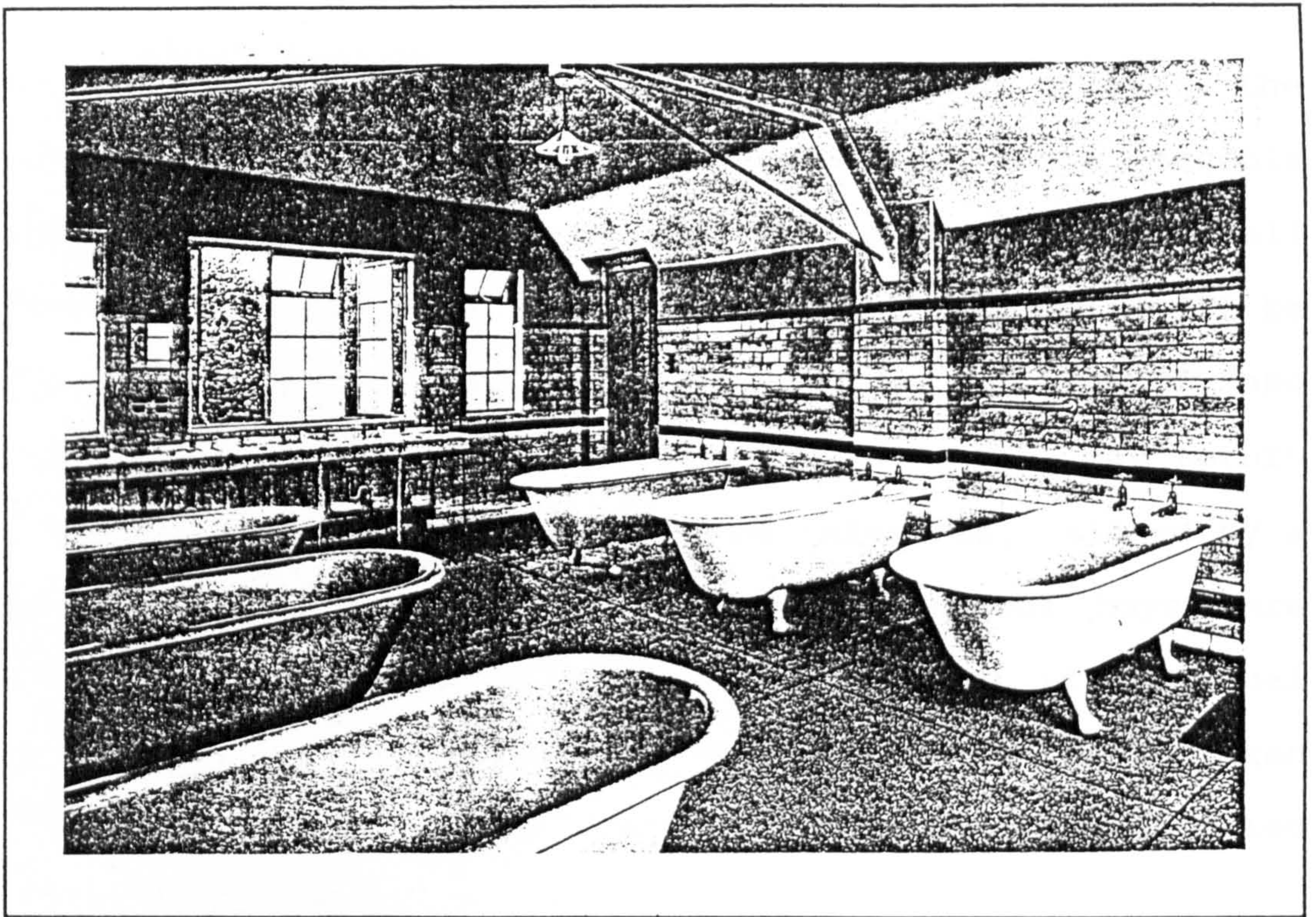
<sup>261</sup> Not recognised as such in the period, usually being described as a 'bad chest.'

<sup>262</sup> I am grateful to Dr.Hugh Pelly for this information.

<sup>263</sup> Hillstone School prospectus, late 1930s, p10.

<sup>264</sup> Stanmore Park had a special bungalow with two wards, each with 8 beds, and a flat for the Sister in the middle. Other schools had similar arrangements.





Extract from Hillstone School prospectus showing the principal bathroom of which they were clearly proud.

To provide these up-to-date features was expensive and might be seen as something special; Twyford School still had earth closets in this period. The memory of typhoid outbreaks at Public Schools not on mains drainage in the previous century lingered still.<sup>265</sup>

Given the risks posed by infection it is not surprising that

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Uppingham, for example, had had to evacuate to North Wales for a whole year after a typhoid outbreak in the 1870's.



schools went to considerable lengths to minimise or avoid the danger of contagion. At Sandroyd and many other schools parents were asked to "adhere strictly to the rule that all parties, theatres, and places of general meeting shall be avoided during the last fortnight of the holidays"<sup>266</sup> and Nevill Holt, amongst others, ruled that "No boy may return without a certificate of freedom from infection, signed by a parent or guardian."<sup>267</sup> On returning to school boys were monitored carefully for any sign of infection: it was usual for the doctor to inspect each boy and temperatures to be taken for the first fortnight. At West Downs the boys were subjected to "Puffing Billy":

"A small room into which some 12 - 15 boys at a time were herded. The room was then filled with steam laced with some kind of antiseptic which was supposed to ward off colds.

The boys wore their Burberrys and could not escape quickly enough after some five minutes' worth of fumigation"<sup>268</sup>

"It was a dreadful experience on the first day of each term being 'sterilised' inside and out in a tiny, dark, airtight room with nasty smelling and suffocating steam."<sup>269</sup>

There was a justifiable health reason for restricting contact with home and the outside world. Most schools followed the rule similar to that at Pinewood whereby:

"During term time boys may not leave the school premises except with permission and under no circumstances may they be taken to any place of public resort, travel by any

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<sup>266</sup> The Sandroydian, No.67 (January 1921), p7.

<sup>267</sup> Nevill Holt prospectus, 1923, p6.

<sup>268</sup> Charles Romer Lee (1918 - 22). Quoted in Hichens (1992), p25.

<sup>269</sup> Lord Hazlerigg; Ibid.



public conveyance, be brought into contact with any other school child, or go home."<sup>270</sup>

Parents and educators of the period realised that a healthy childhood increased the likelihood of a healthy adulthood and were keen not only to avoid disease but to build their charges into well-developed, strong and upstanding young men. A healthy upbringing and the methods used to ensure this formed part of the prep school ethos. The lifestyle and activities such as games served to promote this. Once at school all manner of means were utilised in often vain attempts to maintain or encourage good health.

Fruit, often an extra, was nonetheless prescribed for many boys. Cottesmore opted for oranges after breakfast and attributed their immunity from infection to this.<sup>271</sup> The administration of various "tonics" was commonplace and the malt spooned out by matron was often enjoyed. One contemporary writer advised "There are, in all schools, certain selected children who would benefit by a teaspoonful of malt and cod-liver oil three times a day after food."<sup>272</sup> Boys at The Downs had to gargle for the first fortnight of term and at Sandroyd there were daily nasal sprays of silver nitrate. Nicholas Monsarrat recalled at The Leas, Hoylake:

"Once or twice during the winter, when everyone in the school was sharing the same stuffed up cold, and we wheezed and snuffled like the oldest of old men, we were lined up at the wash basins.

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<sup>270</sup> The Blue and Grey (Pinewood School magazine), Winter 1921, p4.

<sup>271</sup> The Cottesmorian, 7/1929, p129.

<sup>272</sup> Rex Hylton, "The Health of the Modern School Child" in P.S.R. 6/1930, p129.

There the water was turned on, our heads were held firmly over the basin, and jets of salt water from some secondary piece of equipment were forced up one nostril and down the other.

It was very unpleasant. 'Keep still', commanded Sister Tickle ... 'The passages *must* be cleared.' And cleared they were, with a disgusting flow of evidence and a raw stinging sensation which was enough to warn us never to catch colds again."<sup>273</sup>

Breathing exercises, often as part of drill, were supposed to assist physical development and maintain good health. At Ashfold boys had to strip off and stand in rows outside before breakfast to complete a breathing routine. At Arthur Marshall's school boys:

"were all issued with an improving little booklet called 'Self Helps to Health and Fitness' which aimed at producing both the mind serene and the body beautiful. After a foreword on the importance of regular habits, the opening sentence of the main body of the work ran: 'On waking, trumpet vigorously to clear nostrils'. 'To trumpet', we learned, meant to snort noisily outward."<sup>274</sup>

John Mortimer remembered that at the Dragon the headmaster was:

"tremendously keen on iodine lockets. These were small china bottles, full of iodine, tied to a tape which, if worn round the neck at all times would, he was persuaded, prevent any known disease from bunions to botulism. We were all issued with these charms, which we used to fight with like conkers."<sup>275</sup>

The regime of cold baths and general Spartan hardness was expected to fortify one against illness. The Downs specified this in the prospectus where, in a section devoted to health

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<sup>273</sup> Monsarrat (1966), p87.

<sup>274</sup> Arthur Marshall; Life's Rich Pageant (1984), p49.

<sup>275</sup> John Mortimer; Clinging to the Wreckage; p20.



matters, it was written: "each boy has a morning bath, or shower, graded in temperature according to age and physique."<sup>276</sup> More extreme was the experiment at West Downs, later dubbed the "Ice Age":

"Dr Levick lectured us in Shakespeare on 'How to keep fit'. He said that it was necessary to live in the open air as much as possible, and always to have lots of air indoors. He said that it was good for the health to be cold and a very good exercise to shiver. He also told us some of his experiences in the Antarctic. Since then the School has had all its windows wide open, and food which contains vitamins."<sup>277</sup>

"I can honestly say that I suffered far more from the cold at West Downs than I ever did watch-keeping on the open bridge of a destroyer in the Barents Sea. And, alas for Dr Levick's theory, little boys, blue and miserable with cold, fell prey to any passing germ far more rapidly than if they had been luxuriating in a thoroughly unhealthy fug."<sup>278</sup>

There was a growing belief in the period that fresh air aided health and helped prevent infection. A doctor writing in the P.S.R. claimed: "It is important that there should be plenty of air, plenty of fresh, uncontaminated air in the dormitories and classrooms."<sup>279</sup> Fresh air probably reduced the congregation of airborne bacteria while cold did have an invigorating effect which may have led to a feeling of fitness and good health.<sup>280</sup>

Some schools practised more enjoyable programmes of good health maintenance. Nevill Holt had "Sun Baths" whereby "In suitable

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<sup>276</sup> The Downs, Colwall, prospectus; June 1934 (no pagination).

<sup>277</sup> Hesperid (West Downs school mag.) 1930. Quoted in Hichens (1992), p78.

<sup>278</sup> John Aldridge. Quoted in Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> P.S.R. 6/1925, p148.

<sup>280</sup> I am grateful to Dr.Hugh Pelly for this information.

weather, in the Summer Terms, boys are taken into the fields, under the School Doctor's instructions, and allowed to bask in the sunshine for definitely fixed periods of time. On these occasions they wear only shorts, rubber shoes, and sun-hats."<sup>281</sup> A headmaster's wife, writing to the P.S.R., advised "Take off their clothes, that is to say, let them run in only very brief shorts and light shoes, when out of doors,"<sup>282</sup> and do away with curtains and blinds. She claimed that this hardened their skin so that they did not feel the cold and, furthermore, kept them "from getting colds and chills and germs of all sorts"<sup>283</sup> and enabled them to put on weight rapidly. "The improvement," she said, "in their health, appetite and tone generally, is quite unbelievable."<sup>284</sup> At Pinewood there was even an unsuccessful appeal by a parent for the installation of an Ultra Violet Ray machine so that the practise could continue in the winter months. A new boarding house at the Dragon was designed so as to maximise entry of sun. Although a conference of the British Medical Association had suggested exposure of more of the body to light and the suns rays<sup>285</sup> there is no medical evidence to support these beliefs.

Weight was considered a good guide to health and growing up so consequently a boy's progress in putting on weight was careful-

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<sup>281</sup> Nevill Holt prospectus, 1928, p15.

<sup>282</sup> Letter from "A Headmaster's Wife" in P.S.R. 11/1932, p350.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> This conference was held in 1925. See C.H.Jacques, A Dragon Century.



ly monitored. Doctors prescribed special diets for "underweight" boys.<sup>286</sup> Boys were weighed at the beginning and end of term, the additions recorded and noted on the end-of-term report. Some school magazines also carried records of the height and weight of the boys.

The most curious and widely commented-upon practice at the inter-war prep school was the ritual attached to periodic visits to the lavatory. Regular habits were considered essential to good health. A doctor wrote: "Constipation by itself may appear a triviality, but every experienced medical man knows that it leads almost inevitably to permanent and exceedingly serious structural defects which cripple people for life. It is at the root of innumerable diseases..."<sup>287</sup>. These experts advised careful supervision and monitoring of 'evacuations' so school authorities went to considerable lengths to ensure that boys not only 'performed' but did so to a fixed timetable.

"When I was at West Downs, constipation was considered to be a terminal ailment. There was a rumour amongst the boys that if you failed to open your bowels for three days, your rectum would seal itself up - and then where would you be?"<sup>288</sup>

"So much importance is attached at Harecroft to the formation of regular habits of life that no bell rings in the morning after breakfast, and no work begins, until every boy in the School has attended to his morning duties, and has handed in to his dormitory captain a slip of paper to shew that he has done so. By 9 o'clock each morning the Headmaster is in possession of all the reports, and these are passed on, if necessary, to the Matrons at

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<sup>286</sup> See Pellatt (1936), pp258-9.

<sup>287</sup> Sir Arbuthnot Lane, "Racial Health in Preparatory Schools" in P.S.R., 11/1925, p175.

<sup>288</sup> Aldridge in Hichens (1992), p77.

eleven o'clock."<sup>289</sup>

Other schools had lists to be completed on cubicle doors or "numbers" that were to be passed on to the next on the list once one was finished. Perhaps following the advice that "The matron should be responsible for seeing that the daily evacuation is performed ... Very small boys may require actual supervision."<sup>290</sup> Some schools placed a matron, armed with a school list, in front of the door-less cubicles to which the luckless boys had to report. Gerald Priestland recalled:

"The dreaded Miss Ash, the matron, a tyrant in black bombazine whose interest in our bladders and bowels was like that of a conscientious confessor in his penitent. Every morning, junior boys had to present themselves at her sitting room, where she sat marking up her bowel book:

"Please, 'Sash, I've been, 'Sash."

"Lot or little?"

"Lot, 'Sash."

"Hard or soft?"

"Hard, 'Sash, and - please - it hurt coming out."

"Don't be dirty! Syrup of figs for you!"<sup>291</sup>

Failure to produce could have terrifying consequences:

"I was not permitted at Sanitary Prep [the time after breakfast when one was permitted to go to the loo] to 'take a number' in the ordinary way, but had to retire upstairs to some far-distant bathroom, where a commode awaited me. As there was no way of flushing it, the results or non-results of my labours were clear for Sister to see. Overshadowing this situation, as the atom bomb was later to overshadow civilisation, was the ultimate horror-weapon of the time - the enema. I am happy to record that a combination of innate good

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<sup>289</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p6.

<sup>290</sup> "Care of Health in Preparatory Schools" in P.S.R. 11/1936, p276.

<sup>291</sup> Priestland (1986); p32.



health plus an occasional economy with the truth saved me from this fate worse than death.

Eventually Sister called off the hunt; I was permitted to excrete unsupervised, and my bowels and I lived happily ever after."<sup>292</sup>

Finally:

"To make doubly sure that all was well in this important field, twice every term in the evening we were all given (and seen to drink) a mugful of hot milk mixed with powdered liquorice - a mixture of unbelievable nastiness, thick and green in colour and sickly sweet to taste [Gregory's Powder was a similar aperient often used]. Its effects were almost immediate, highly explosive and totally effective. The scenes in the corridors outside the "dubbs", as we used to call them, were Dante-esque in the extreme."<sup>293</sup>

Modern medics recognise that individual bowel movements vary and that it is not necessary to evacuate the bowel every day. This preoccupation may, for a small number, have been medically unsound. Certainly this insistence on regularity seems more another aspect of control and discipline than of medical necessity.

Apart from mass epidemics Old Boys do not have detailed recollections of being ill. Most regarded it, as a modern child would, as an unpleasant burden or bore - confined to a clinical sickbay to be dosed with unpalatable medicines for often protracted periods. For some though it was an escape from the daily grind of work and games and occasionally boys envied those who were ill, particularly in a schools such as Arthur Marshall's:

"In those days it meant instant withdrawal from work and games and a delightfully restful

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<sup>292</sup> Aldridge in Hichens (1992), p77.

<sup>293</sup> Desmond Fitzgerald in Christopher Richmond; A History of Ashdown House; p23.

period in the sickroom, with Matron at her friendly best and what hotels refer to as "full room service" ... and added enjoyment was, once safely installed, to hear distant sounds of scholastic activity, with its constant ups and downs and anxious moments."<sup>294</sup>

In some schools it was considered "bad form" to be ill. At Horris Hill, for example, the boys hissed those returning from the San.<sup>295</sup> It was not always easy to convince Sister that you were "off games" or should be despatched to sickbay. Once you were admitted you were expected to settle down and recover quickly. A boy at St.Anselm's, who claimed he had taken his pill but was later found out, was sent for by the headmaster and caned.<sup>296</sup> The headmaster's wife would usually write home to inform the parents that their son was in sickbay but was "quite happy and cheerful and will soon be well again and back in school."<sup>297</sup>

Sometimes there were contradictions in the health care offered by prep schools. While they professed to take great care over the good maintenance of health there were a few lapses. Poor food at Temple Grove led to boys who "were perpetually hungry and cold and suffered from styes, boils and chilblains."<sup>298</sup> A Sandroyd Old Boy is partially deaf as, having had his head pushed underwater during his cold bath and catching an ear infection, the matron told him that he was imagining it and

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<sup>294</sup> "Marshall Lore" in The Sunday Telegraph 30/9/1990. Extracts from Arthur Marshall; Follow the Sun; Sinclair Stevenson, 1990.

<sup>295</sup> Information from Mr.Jimmy Stow, interview 7/1991.

<sup>296</sup> Martin Beckett (Ed.); All Our Yesterdays (1988); p28.

<sup>297</sup> Letter from Madeleine Hornby (Sandroyd, 5/10/1923) to Mrs.Richards. Property of Mrs M.Richards.

<sup>298</sup> Peter Waterfield (1933-37) in O.T.G.Newsletter, 1988.



refused to believe his complaints.<sup>299</sup> At Summer Fields:

"In my second year ... I nearly died. I felt, very gradually, iller and iller. Miss Pierce was sceptical and rather annoyed, until even she realised that I must be put to bed. A fatalistic old buffer of a doctor called at intervals to see me and went away without prescribing anything that was of the slightest use. My heart pounded like a steam engine whenever I tried so much as to turn in bed. I was finally taken away in an ambulance by my mother and our family doctor - a skin-of-the-teeth rescue operation - and slowly brought back to health at home."<sup>300</sup>

The most infamous case of lack of care occurred at a Sussex school in the 1930s. A boy had kept complaining of stomach pain but the assistant matron thought he was malingering. Finally the doctor diagnosed appendicitis and although he was taken to hospital he later died. The case was blown up by the tabloid press and the ensuing bad publicity caused the school considerable distress.

Cases such as these were exceptions. Prep schools worked extremely hard and conscientiously to maintain the good health and upbringing of the boys in their care. While occasionally the attention can seem overdone their activities must be placed in the context of a time when less was known about the human body and cures for many diseases were unavailable or of limited or slow effectiveness. Health was a major issue of inter-war prep school life and was treated accordingly by both parents and school authorities.

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<sup>299</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.109.

<sup>300</sup> John Lehman in Usborne (1964), p145.

## C O N C L U S I O N

Life at a boarding prep school in the inter-war period was highly regulated and strictly ordered. Routines and traditions were rarely altered. The day was segmented into clearly defined parts, the timing of which was regulated by bells. Boys followed these timings and instructions methodically and without exception. Their time was very controlled and in an ordinary day there were few occasions in which time was 'free' or they were able to make their own decisions as to what they might do. An Old Sandroydian commented "Life was totally regulated; every minute of it."<sup>301</sup> and a Lambrook Old Boy wrote "There never seemed any time ... to do anything except what had to be done and there was only just time to do that."<sup>302</sup>

This regulation extended to the minutiae of ordinary life. Not only did every boy have to do almost every thing at the same time but this was subject to regular and formal inspection: tidiness in the morning, performance at the lavatory, medical inspection - the list is long. Regulation and rules were such that at West Downs, for example, permission was needed to go to the loo at any time and total silence was to be maintained there; if one boy wanted to take another out on a parental visit both were obliged to obtain written permission from their parents.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Mr. Peter Ansdell, interview 8/1993.

<sup>302</sup> Brownless, manuscript history, chapter GFC4.

<sup>303</sup> Hichens (1992), p89.



Regulation and order formed part of the ethos of these schools. So much of life within them was dictated by this ethos, an ethos which was, in turn, determined by the prep schools customers - the parents themselves. Schools which failed to conform with parental wishes would ultimately be forced to close. If aspects of life were tough then they were probably meant to be: they formed part of the character-building process central to the ethos.

There were practical reasons for keeping the boys under such tight control. Compulsory activities, done at the same time, eased supervision. Close supervision reduced naughtiness and bullying. Allowing little scope for free-time activity further restricted opportunities for misdemeanour. A busy day maximised the opportunities of boarding school life and prevented boys becoming bored or homesick. While the level of control may seem extraordinary in retrospect, an Old Boy pointed out that at the time it was "accepted as normal and posed no problems."<sup>304</sup>

Finally, we must be beware of judging schools of the inter-war period from a modern perspective. Much of what went on in prep schools of this period reflected contemporary standards, beliefs and expectations. For the vast majority of boys and parents at the time the daily routine in prep schools was normal, satisfactory and to be expected.

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<sup>304</sup> Sandroyd survey respondent no.98.

## 7: GAMES

*See the boys with raucous shouts  
Punting vigorously the football,  
Punting high the great round football,  
Hear the gong ring loud and harshly,  
Hear the shouts of wild dismay.  
Hear the laggard moaning loudly,  
Too much work and not much play.  
In the Summer in the meadow  
Hear them play the game of cricket,  
Hear the bowler's shout of "How's that,"  
Hear the umpire's shout of "not out."<sup>1</sup>*

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On the 30th of March 1892 a group of prep school headmasters met to discuss the size of the cricket ball to be used in matches between their schools. The resolution was passed that:

"This meeting is of the opinion that it is not advisable for boys under fifteen to use a full-sized ball with the wickets pitched at twenty-two yards."<sup>2</sup>

The consequence of this important gathering is now well-known: the formation of the Association of Head Masters of Preparatory Schools, the fore-runner to the modern I.A.P.S. The very purpose of this meeting is in itself a clue to the role of games in the life of the prep school.

There can be no doubting their importance. Examination of the time allotted to sporting activity reveals the first clue as to

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from "The Song of Beaudesert" by A.F.M.Palmer. Quoted in Beaudesert Park School Magazine, Vol.2 No.4, p21.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in D.P.Leinster-Mackay, The Rise of the English Prep School (1984), p157.



its status: it was common-place to spend every afternoon except Sunday on the games field. On average this amounted to one hour per day but on Wednesdays and Saturdays there were no afternoon lessons and sessions lasting up to three hours<sup>3</sup> were feasible. Some schools also had games periods for an hour in the morning before lunch or had times set aside within the timetable. Cricket required exceptional quantities of time and its premier status is examined later.

Further evidence of the high position accorded games abounds. Contemporary school magazines are dominated by sports reports<sup>4</sup> which often describe every match in great detail.<sup>5</sup> Oral sources rarely failed to mention prep school games and for some this was one of their most enduring memories. School advertisements often mentioned the school's games record and when recruiting teachers it was generally expected that the successful applicant should be able to coach one of the major sports. Indeed, the possession of a university blue might rate as a suitable qualification. It was on the games field that inter-school rivalry was most clearly manifest.

Many of England's most commonly played sports had their origins in the public schools and it is natural that the prep school should be seen as the nursery for future talent. Competition in 'manly and character-forming' games forms a key component of the public school legend and is prominent in the popular

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3 In the case of cricket.

4 The summer 1927 edition of The Sandroydian is typical: 37 of its 77 pages are devoted to sporting reports. Of the remaining 40 pages 26 are just filled with lists in various forms.

5 See copy of cricket report (Fig.2).

conception of independent schools. David Newsome examined the origins of 'muscular Christianity' and the notion of *mens sana in corpore sano*.<sup>6</sup> He traced the idea back to Thomas Hughes's love of boxing and rugby:

"This is worth living for; the whole sum of schoolboy existence gathered up into one straining, struggling half-hour, a half-hour worth a year of common life."<sup>7</sup>

George Cotton combated lawlessness at Marlborough by the introduction of organized games and Edward Thring insisted that Uppingham should have excellent playing fields and a gymnasium. Gradually scholars on the staff of public schools began to be replaced by blues and the new staff tended to be those who were keen to maintain their games. By the end of the century Victorian public school headmasters had made the playing of games fundamental to their training of character and peer values rated prowess at games above all else. The prestige of the 'bloods' is well-documented - as are all the excesses that his philosophy engendered.

The explanations for the great stress laid upon games are closely linked with the essential ethos of prep schools. Here was another means by which character might be instilled: compulsory daily participation in school games represented a method of making boys into men, of inculcating that manliness and bravery upon which such a high value was placed. In 1928 the Headmaster of West Hayes wrote:

"The value of games ... as a means of inculcating public spirit, unselfishness, and co-operation has often been stated by English writers, but can scarcely be exaggerated. It is

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<sup>6</sup> David Newsome, Godliness and Good Learning (1961).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hughes, Tom Brown's Schooldays. Quoted in Newsome (1961), p203.



a right instinct that gives them such a important place in the life of our boarding schools."<sup>8</sup>

Evidence for the link between games and character is widespread.<sup>9</sup> Consider this extract from a 1937 school advertisement:

"The importance of Gymnastics and organised games with regard to health, physical development and formation of character is fully realised, and no boy is excused these."<sup>10</sup>

Having written that "I agree that the boy must have his games .... [for] The spirit of play is vital for his health and happiness and a great stimulant for the development of character"<sup>11</sup>, a parent then specified those aspects of character which games were expected to develop. They include qualities of self-sacrifice, endurance, chivalry, determination, courage, self-control, honesty, modesty, judgment, resource and self-reliance. The emphasis is on social and collective values rather than ones connected purely with the individual. The similarity with the prep school ethos is obvious. Similar themes appear when one school historian addressed the issue:

"authority rightly recognised, and still does, the genuine value of games as a training in courage, self-reliance, loyalty and patience, not to mention that much abused phrase 'good sportsmanship'. "<sup>12</sup>

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8 Alan Rannie, "The Preparatory School" in J.Dover Wilson (Ed.), The Schools of England (1928), p78.

9 Readers of The Boys' Journal had been informed as early as 1865 that "Brave boys make brave men. Good soldiers, dauntless hunters, adventurous explorers, and good volunteers, all owe a great deal to the pastimes they enjoyed between school hours and in vacations. Indeed much of the greatness of our nation is to be attributed to the training which takes place in the playground. For summer we have a capital games in cricket; for winter ... we have football." Extract from The Boys' Journal, 1865, II, p17. Quoted in James Walvin, "Symbols of moral superiority: slavery, sport and the changing world order, 1800 - 1950." in J.A.Mangan and James Walvin (Eds.), Manliness and Morality (1987), p249.

10 Advertisement for Ash-Eton, Folkestone in Schools 1937, p371.

11 "The Value of Physical Training in Preparatory Schools" in P.S.R., 12/1926, p298.

12 Meston Bachelor, Cradle of Empire (Temple Grove) (1981), p77.

Games were thought to beget a whole gamut of desirable characteristics. James Walvin notes that the qualities which games implanted were more than merely for the benefit of the individual. He writes that:

"The natural instinct for play among the young was given a new focus and purpose. Games became an agency for disciplining the young and addicting them to a number of important individual and collective qualities: obedience, physical commitment, accepting rules and authority and to give one's all for the good of the team (or house, or school, or country). They also of course involved the universal lessons of endurance and fortitude, and give and take and striving to win."<sup>13</sup>

Basic training complete, boys would move on to public school where they would continue to play these games and be moulded by their lessons. They would absorb qualities "clearly important in the world of imperial conquest and administration."<sup>14</sup> The value of these games-inspired qualities, to country as much as individual, in the long-term was often in the prep school headmaster's mind. The Pelham House school magazine reported on the introduction of new games in 1919:

"which make especially for the training of the mind and body in alertness and obedience.

One of the most important things they cultivate is the carrying out of verbal orders with promptitude and correctness."<sup>15</sup>

Another school historian wrote of the games and physical education:

"which developed in his pupils the quick co-ordination of mind and muscle, of eye and ear, so essential throughout life. Together with this came instant and accurate obedience

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<sup>13</sup> Walvin (1987), p250.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Pelham House Magazine Vol.III, No.2 (Christmas and Lent 1918 - 1919), p27.



to the spoken word or visual sign."<sup>16</sup>

These goals have significant social repercussions - implying as they do an instant and unquestioning obedience to rules and command; contemporary society itself might be seen as having similar confines and restrictions, standards to be attained and rules not to be broken.

Even on a more simple level many writers noted the importance of games in the promotion of 'healthy' competition and ambition.<sup>17</sup> As almost all boys would be passing on to public schools where, if anything, games enjoyed an even more prominent position, it was essential that the prep school laid the necessary groundwork. These schools were quick to point out that "Too great a stress cannot be laid on the importance of giving a boy sound coaching as young as possible if he is to excel in later years."<sup>18</sup>

Games were an important vehicle for controlling small boys. Large numbers could be supervised for lengthy periods at minimum cost in terms of staff and facilities. Opportunities for misdemeanour were lessened if boys were corralled into a regulated environment. The requirements of rules and insistence upon good sportsmanship entailed control on the part of the player. Success and defeat were to be greeted with cheerful politeness whilst tension, stress and physical pain should be borne without outward display. Few schools were

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<sup>16</sup> H.D.Martineau, Half a Century of St.Hugh's School, Woodhall Spa (1975), p4.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Stanley S.Harris, The Master and His Boys (1924), p70.

<sup>18</sup> Hillstone School (Malvern) prospectus, late 1930's, p19.

brave enough to specify the value of games in a 'moral' sense although one commentator wrote:

"Athletics go far towards solving the problems of sex, for when exercise is most needed the sexual urge is strongest, and if such exercise is not provided the danger of sexual abuse is increased."<sup>19</sup>

Games also served several other less ambitious purposes. Obviously physical exercise and exertion is an essential part of a child's bodily development, providing the necessary stimulus for muscular growth and promoting good health in later life. One contemporary writer wrote that "It strengthens the body; hardens it and gives physical expression to striving and self-effort."<sup>20</sup> It is often forgotten that for the majority of boys games were a pleasant and fulfilling recreation to be looked forward to and entered into with enthusiasm and energy. Given the great attention paid toward the maintenance of good health the role of games in this respect was rarely overlooked. Under the heading "Health" the Hillstone School prospectus noted that "The physical development of every boy is watched over with the greatest care."<sup>21</sup>

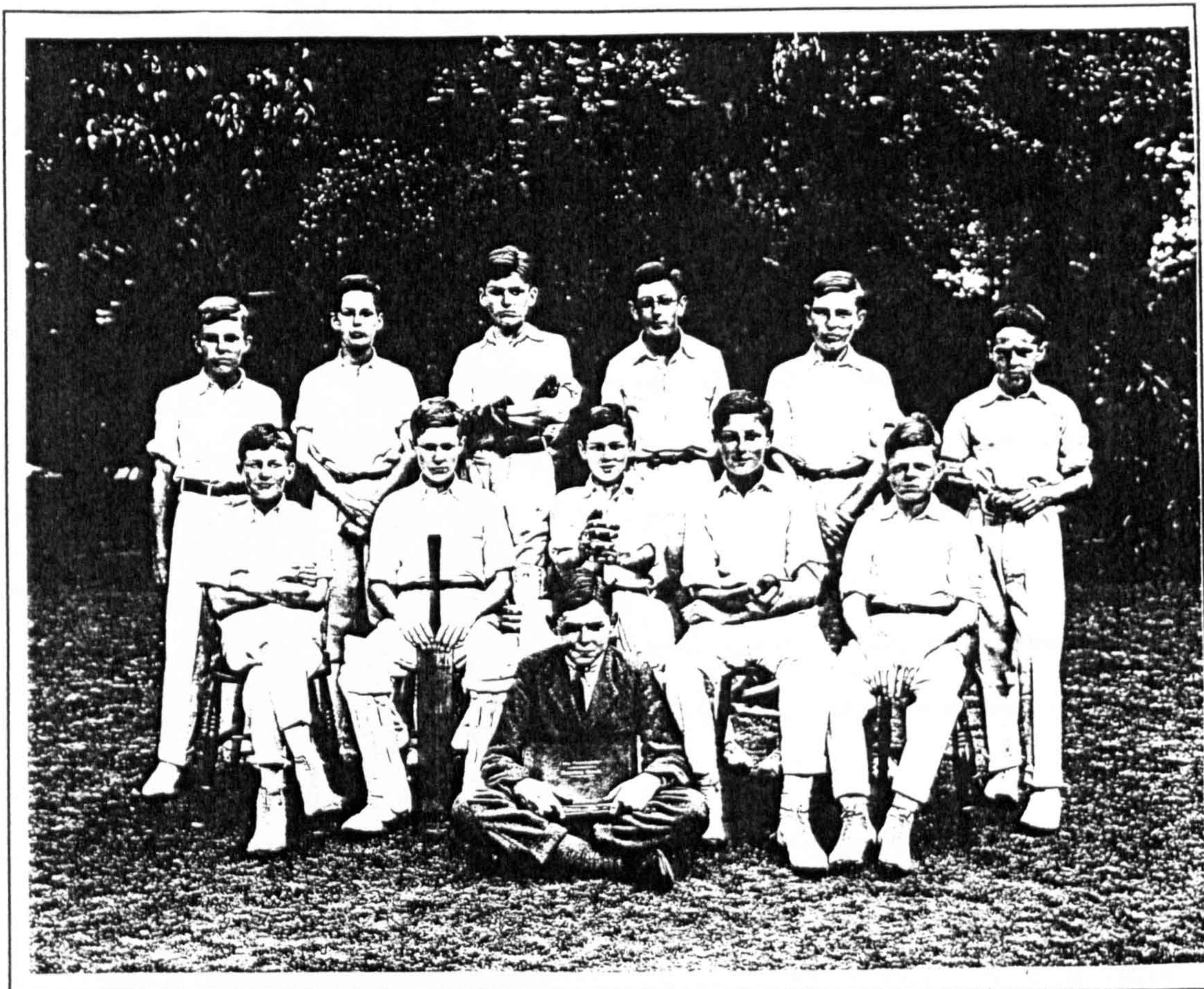
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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Durlston, The Preparatory School System (1926), p79.

<sup>20</sup> P.S.R., 12/1926, p298.

<sup>21</sup> Hillstone School prospectus, late 1930's, p20.





Sandroyd School Cricket XI, 1927. (Source: Sandroyd archives)

The foremost prep school game was undoubtedly cricket. The importance of this quintessentially English game must be emphasised. The retired headmaster of Horris Hill quipped that his school was "founded on classics and cricket."<sup>22</sup> When asked what the ultimate aims and goals of his school were another old headmaster stated "Academic excellence, undoubtedly. Allied to considerable skill at cricket."<sup>23</sup> It was described as "indigenous to the preparatory schoolboy's world."<sup>24</sup> Evidence abounds as to the importance of this game and the way in which

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<sup>22</sup> Mr.Jimmy Stow, interview 7/1991.

<sup>23</sup> Mr.Richard Vickers (Scaitcliffe), interview 4/1992.

<sup>24</sup> James Kenward, Prep School (1958), p81.



it dominated the school's summer activity. In a typical summer the Sandroyd First XI would play 17 matches - virtually one every Saturday and Wednesday. The School Magazine, generally a fairly brief document, devoted considerable space to score-cards and reports of each match (See extract). A section contained critiques of individual players, batting and bowling averages, catches, scores over 50 and even prospects for the next season. The only photograph in the magazine was that of the First XI. After a miserable summer the editor of the Brockhurst School magazine morosely noted:

"A summer term without any cricket matches is but a story without a plot. Games, it is true, are not everything, even in an English school, but cricket is and must always be a matter of importance."<sup>25</sup>

Even reports home commented on cricketing ability.<sup>26</sup>

All boys were expected to involve themselves in the game and every summer week-day afternoon was devoted to cricket coaching. The half-holiday arrangement for Wednesdays and Saturdays allowed lengthy three hour matches to be played. Boys not representing the school would still have a prolonged games session before, at many schools, being required to sit and watch the First XI. Sometimes they were compelled to score as well. Cricket so dominated potential free-time that even leaves out and visits from parents were affected. At Horris Hill boys were allowed two leaves out during term-time which could be taken on a Wednesday or Saturday after 1.30 but all boys had to be back at 2.00 for cricket even if they were not

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<sup>25</sup> The Brock, Summer 1932, p3.

<sup>26</sup> Consider, for example, this sequence from one headmaster: 9/4/1930 "The best of luck to him in his cricket next term."; 12/6/1931: "He is doing good work and is no mean performer behind the wickets." 29/7/1931: "He promises well as a wicket keeper." Reports of G.C.A.Doughty (Sandroyd). Private papers.



playing in a team. They were then free to go out again at 5.00. "The whole school played cricket without exception."<sup>27</sup> At Beaudesert Park during break good cricketers were expected to take two less able boys and coach them while the Headmaster went around supervising. At the beginning of the period it was rare for any school to field more than a First XI so for

Seventh Match.	
June 11th, v. Banstead Hall. Home. Won by 162 runs.	
Once again Borwick lost the toss and we took the field. Though our bowling was lamentably weak, the fielding was an improvement on our earlier performances and we had no difficulty in getting them out for a small score. Palmer and Ommanney had three wickets each for 7 and 19: Carr-Walker, Webster and Read one each for 4, 14 and 15. The catches were taken for the most part and the ground fielding was clean and smart. Our innings was chiefly remarkable for a fine century by Bewicke, an innings full of vigorous hits; useful scores by the other four first batsmen; and a complete failure of the other six, who only managed to collect 13 between them! Roundell was tried as wicket-keeper, but found the conditions rather beyond his powers. There were too many byes, which were not entirely his fault.	
BANSTEAD HALL.	SANDROYD.
M. G. Haworth, b Carr-Walker 12	J. A. J. Read, b W. Young .. 27
W. A. D. Young, run out ... 3	C. Bewicke, b J. Young ... 114
R. A. W. Williams, b Ommanney ... 4	A. D. Palmer, c & b Dobbs ... 27
J. D. S. Young, c Palmer, b Ommanney ... 4	C. J. M. Ommanney, b Dobbs 25
C. G. Tait, b Read ... 11	P. M. Borwick, c Dobbs, b Haworth ... 25
F. P. N. Dyer, b Palmer... 12	G. N. C. Wigram, not out ... 7
H. A. C. Dobbs, lbw, b Palmer 0	B. R. Macnamara, b Haworth 4
C. G. Johnson, c Read, b Palmer ... 2	N. W. H. Gaydon, b W. Young 0
J. S. Paget, c Gaydon, b Webster... 7	C. I. Carr-Walker, c Haworth, b J. Young ... 1
J. J. Mann, not out ... 3	R. J. Webster, b W. Young ... 1
A. W. Swann, st Roundell, b Ommanney ... 1	H. R. M. Roundell, b W. Young 0
Extras ... 13	Extras ... 3
Total ... 72	Total ... 234

Typical Sandroyd Cricket report. (From The Sandroydian of 1927.)

many boys there was no chance to take part in external, inter-school, matches until their last year. The less able, of course, never took part at all. However, there was an increasing tendency to involve more boys in competition with a Second XI and sometimes Colts (Under 11) fixtures.<sup>28</sup> Often this was seen as a means of strengthening the First XI - the pride of the school and the schools representatives and sporting ambassadors: "This innovation is decidedly useful and helps towards picking out representatives for the following year."<sup>29</sup> Yet even for those not in the team the success of the

27 Mr.Jimmy Stow, interview 7/1991.

28 St.Andrew's, Eastbourne had nine cricket XI's in the 1920s but this was exceptional.

29 The Brock, Summer 1927, p16.

First XI was emphasised.<sup>30</sup> The headmaster might lay on some small treat as reward for success against a great rival or even a half-holiday if he was particularly impressed. One school magazine noted:

"It was necessary to place the facts very plainly before the School, to convince them that the School cricket is a matter which closely affects every boy, from the Captain of the XI to No.11 on a Junior Game side."<sup>31</sup>

Enthusiasm for the game was both expected and enforced:

"It was encouraging to find such keenness in the cricket maintained throughout the term. Cricket is, of course, THE game, and everyone from greatest to least will understand this."<sup>32</sup>

One Old Boy even remembered enjoying games "Even when hauled out of the San to play in a school match after which covered in my own excrement matron bathed me horrified and I had to stay in the San longer to recover."<sup>33</sup>

Not only did cricket dominate the summer sporting scene but was keenly anticipated almost as soon as the last season had ended. "We are never tired of hearing that the cricket season should begin as early as possible,"<sup>34</sup> wrote one editor. As summer approached boys were encouraged to practise:

"Cricket on the gravel this term is going strong and our ideas for next term are already hopeful, but those individuals who persistently ignore opportunities for practice may find

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30 Sometimes this success could be spectacularly one-sided. One boy wrote home "Our first XI played Sunnydown. They made 22, we made 160 for no wickets." B.Richards (Sandroyd). Property of Mrs.M.Richards.

31 The Twyfordian, 7/1919, p8.

32 Aymestry Court Magazine, Summer 1927.

33 Sandroyd survey respondent no.18.

34 The Cottesmorian, 3/1924, p4.



it anything but an easy matter to obtain a place in the Cricket XI."<sup>35</sup>

Matters stepped up a gear as the holidays commenced. "Fielding will play a great part in settling the final distribution of the Purple Ribbon. Time spent during the holidays in getting hands into order is never wasted,"<sup>36</sup> instructed The Sandroydian, while at Pinewood the authorities said, "We would strongly urge parents who are in a position to do so, to get their boys some cricket coaching during the holidays."<sup>37</sup> Books were published on how to improve your cricket and the services of professional coaches well advertised.

The importance attached to cricket was justified by the qualities it instilled:

"Only a game, but a great game. That it fosters 'team spirit' is, I suppose, its highest claim to be considered a part of education. But there are other claims - the necessity for nerve and endurance, the taking of hard knocks and disappointment without complaint."<sup>38</sup>

These all form part of the character-building games regime. One Old Boy remembers moving away from a taking a catch in a game. The headmaster was watching and called him to the study later in the day. He was given a long talking to: "The Headmaster said he did not approve of cowardice."<sup>39</sup> A school historian noted:

"Cricket has always been taken seriously at Brockhurst as 'character building', summed up in a general comment on the 1922 team. There was a 'tendency to draw away from the

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35 Ibid.

36 The Sandroydian, Summer 1930, p34.

37 The Blue and Grey, Winter 1926, p7.

38 A.W.B., "Cricket and the Boy" in P.S.R., 6/1930, p131.

39 Mr. Joseph Selka (Malsis), interview 4/1992.

ball if it looked as if it might hit you. My advice is to stand still and let it hit you. It

cannot kill you.'"<sup>40</sup>

It was rare then to wear the body armour of a modern cricketer.

Support for the status of cricket came from all quarters. Most staff, boys and parents approved<sup>41</sup> and Headmasters were often keen players themselves. At some schools staff continued to play cricket for clubs or their Oxbridge college.<sup>42</sup> The explanation for some schools placing a greater emphasis upon the game was usually not hard to find. The Headmaster of Beaudesert Park was "mad on"<sup>43</sup> the game and the head of The Elms was from "a cricketing family"<sup>44</sup> and both he and his sons had played some first-class cricket. A Wychwood Old Boy described cricket as the Headmaster's "major passion".<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> J.T.Fleming, A Century off the Examiner (1984), p32.

<sup>41</sup> Although such support was not universal. Lady Scott removed her son Peter from Sandroyd because she thought there was too much emphasis on games and not enough on natural history.

<sup>42</sup> St.Peter's, Seaford and St.Andrew's, Eastbourne both fielded a staff teams to play against Cambridge colleges.

<sup>43</sup> According to Mrs.E.Keyte (his daughter), interview 11/1991.

<sup>44</sup> Col.G.M.Singleton (his son), interview 10/1991.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Townsend, Time and Chance (1978), p47.



## O T H E R   T E A M   G A M E S

Winter sports were rarely accorded the prestige or importance of cricket. The weather, particularly in the Lent term, contrived to make practice and playing difficult and no sport required the finesse, patience and peculiarities that make cricket unique.

Soccer was the principal winter team game in the south-east of England - the area of greatest prep. school concentration. The preference of at least four of the Clarendon public schools, including Eton, was for soccer and this may well have strongly influenced headmasters up until 1914. Far fewer Old Boys remember soccer being played with such great enthusiasm or dedication and school magazines carry far less information on the matches and players. The 1920 Twyfordian merely noted:

"We are beginning to play real football instead of the 'kick it away and hope for the best'

kind of game that has too often passed for football in recent years."<sup>46</sup>

Coaching in this game was given and matches against other schools played but the 'hope for the best' attitude seemed to prevail in many schools. However, some boys did have a passion for the game and it is hard to imagine any school not taking sport seriously. One Summer Fields Old Boy described the build-up to a big soccer game against their long-standing rival, Cothill House:

"None of us had been able to concentrate during that last week, and I was afraid lest one of the side should earn himself a whacking or be put in Black Book 2 for inattention, with disastrous effects on morale. In the event nobody got so much as a double-sided copy;

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<sup>46</sup> The Twyfordian, 12/1920, p49.

I think none of the staff dared risk Boltosh's [the Headmaster] wrath by demoralizing any of his precious First Eleven ...

In Fifth Form the tension was unbearable. That long, bony finger, and the jumbo yellow pencil, probed around the class much as usual, pausing now and then as one of us, too late, remembered the meaning of the vocab-book word a fraction of a second before it passed the lips of the next in line ...

But Saturday's match was in the forefront of all minds, and the whole of ancient literature seemed crammed with subtle references to the impending decisive battle. On the Friday evening we sang the psalm usually reserved for the day before Common Entrance: 'the ploughers ploughed along my back and made long furrows.' It wished us good luck in the name of the Lord. And finally Saturday came."<sup>47</sup>

In the north and west of England soccer was less frequently played. Here Rugby Union - 'rugger' - was the winter game and it seemed to arouse greater fervour. This was the Nevill Holt rugger song:

*Snatching a win from disaster*

*Saving a game just on time,*

*Sticking together, all on the leather,*

*who cares for bruises or grime?*

*Whether you charge in the forwards,*

*Or dash for the line with the backs,*

*Sticking together, fair or foul weather,*

*Rugger's the game for both duffers and crack.*

*Stick to it, all,*

*Stick to it, all,*

*Play up and run up and keep on the ball.*



*Never give up when you're losing,*

*Don't put on side when you win.*

*Brother with brother play for each other,*

*Major and minor and min.*

*If you're licked you must not be downhearted,*

*Play all the harder instead,*

*No game is won till it's over and done,*

*Never, Oh never, say die till you're dead.*

*Stick to it, all,*

*Stick to it, all,*

*Play up and run up and keep on the ball.<sup>48</sup>*

Rugger possessed many of the qualities so valued in cricket, especially the need to subsume self to the needs of the team. It also emphasised physical bravery and courage: manly qualities so keenly sought. "It is a game which brings out all that is best in boys and men, pluck, physical fitness, loyalty and an esprit-de-corps found in no other game."<sup>49</sup> Increasingly rugger came to take a greater importance than soccer and even to equal cricket in stature. The reasons for this change are manifold:

"Rugger was considered to be a more suitable game for small boys .... In the first place Soccer requires more skill to be enjoyable and though a Preparatory School 1st XI may reach a very creditable standard the smaller boys are likely to get more enjoyment out of Rugger. Secondly, in Soccer the play is less equally distributed amongst the players; some may take little active part in the game for considerable periods of time, and in cold or wet weather small boys are unable to keep sufficiently warm. In Rugger, though the ball may not move about as fast the players move faster and there are seldom cases of numb

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<sup>48</sup> Manuscript in Nevill Holt School archives.

<sup>49</sup> Carmen Strigis (Hillstone magazine), Winter 1923, p11.

fingers. Thirdly, Rugger demands a certain quality of courage and determination in making a tackle or a run for the line that cannot be found in Soccer. To quote the late Headmaster of a neighbouring Preparatory School: 'Soccer teaches boys to run round, but Rugger teaches them to go through.'<sup>50</sup>

"We matrons were all for rugger; here the boys learnt to fall and to tackle and to run about like mad. They never came to much harm as they had not far to fall."<sup>51</sup>

To this should be added the opportunities it gave to non-soccer boys and the fact that many public schools were playing the game and there was a need for suitably educated entrants. Perhaps a hidden reason might have been the social superiority of Rugby Football, a game played by amateurs and public school boys, rather than the round ball games of paid players and the working classes. There were worries that the physical nature of the game was too much for younger boys and some headmasters regarded it as too 'rough' a game for their charges. This did not prevent the emergence of a trend from soccer to rugby that has continued to the present day. Initially it might be introduced alongside soccer but it was not long before a comment similar to "Brockhurst is now a firm believer in Rugger .... this truly manly game"<sup>52</sup> was expressed.

The bodily contact necessary does make rugby a physically 'harder' game than soccer. The conditions in which the game was played were also occasionally fairly fearsome. An extract from The Cottlesmorian, describing a match against Rottingdean,

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<sup>50</sup> W.Frazer Hoyland, Aedificandum Est (1943), p34.

<sup>51</sup> Flora Scott, And One Ran Away (1991), p82.

<sup>52</sup> The Brock, Easter 1930, p6.



should suffice: "The ground was hard, while snow fell at intervals, and the play was fast."<sup>53</sup> Some writers went so far as to claim that the introduction of rugger has an immediately beneficial effect on the 'tone' of the school:

"Rugger has been successful and undoubtedly popular and it is really wonderful to note the effect which this game has upon character and attitude in general. Difficulties in school are certainly 'tackled' with greater pluck now that we have learnt to tackle an opposing three-quarter, however hard he may be going. All of this may sound pedantic, but it is a fact that games are not played for themselves alone at school."<sup>54</sup>

Hockey was the third winter team game permitted some prominence:

"Hockey has been definitely adopted as the game for the spring term. It gives an opportunity to boys who may not be too nimble on their feet, but who are the fortunate possessors of a straight eye and a supple wrist."<sup>55</sup>

While some schools were playing inter-school games in this discipline as early as 1923 it was slow to catch on. Hockey was not seen as a 'manly' game and staff able to coach it were not always available. It also required the level sports fields that not all prep schools were able to provide. To adopt hockey seriously and to play inter-school games, opponents had to be found in the vicinity and it, like the other winter sports, depended on this for popularity. Any change in the winter game played required the co-operation of neighbouring schools and was inevitably a slow process.

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53      The Cottesmorian, 7/1919, p137.

54      The Brock, Easter 1928, p5.

55      Ibid, Easter 1921, p4.

Cricket, soccer, rugby and hockey are all 'team' games - games which require players to work together toward a common goal. Alternative sports such as tennis or athletics are individual occupations. Success in them depends entirely on the performance of the one competitor and it is not necessary to work with others. Individual sports were rarely accorded the status of team games. The philosophy behind games emphasised the corporate spirit and collective values that team games supplied. Team games occupied more boys and required fewer expensive facilities. At some schools games played by individuals were actively discouraged. One headmaster stated: "Personally I am not very keen on 'sports' [athletics] as such - they appeal too much to the individual rather than to the team spirit."<sup>56</sup> Another advised:

"cricket and football should be the chief games, as they are essentially British and teach the boy to subordinate his own interests to those of the side. Tennis, fives and squash rackets do not demand the same unselfishness from the player and should in consequence take only a very secondary place."<sup>57</sup>

Walvin notes the superiority of team games:

"Both [cricket and football] were subjected to the determining regulation of the clock and both demanded of their players an acceptance of a given role within the team. A player's role and value was subsumed to the greater needs of the team itself. As teams, cricket and football had a chain of command which reached from playing field into a higher structure of authority. Playing these games ... was a means of accepting that structure of authority; obedience to betters/superiors, obeying orders and a commitment to pursuing the interests of the team ..."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Mr.Hooper, headmaster of Hillstone, in speech to parents 1923. Reported in Carmen Strigis, Winter 1923, p6.

<sup>57</sup> Paul King, Preparatory School Ideals (1924), p57.

<sup>58</sup> Walvin (1987), p250.



## I N D I V I D U A L     G A M E S

One individual physical activity officially sanctioned and encouraged was swimming, but swimming was never considered a 'true' sport. Writers referred to the "noble art"<sup>59</sup> and while some schools held swimming matches inter-school competition was uncommon if not non-existent. However, to be able to swim was one of life's essentials and it was incumbent upon the prep school to ensure that its boys could ensure their survival in this way. Swimming was an accepted summer recreation which had the advantage of gathering a number of boys in one, easily supervised, location and providing them with plenty of exhausting exercise.

"The bathing season did not usually begin till mid-May but in spite of this and the unheated water, it was very seldom that a Summer Term passed without all the beginners having learned to swim at least one breadth by the end of the term."<sup>60</sup>

"Quite a number of boys can now swim quite respectably who in June were afraid to trust themselves at any distance greater than a yard from the bar at the side of the bath."<sup>61</sup>

Schools were keen that all boys should learn to swim as soon as possible although this was not always a skill readily acquired. There is more than a hint of character building in Old Boys' accounts of their initial training.

"I recall with less pleasure swimming lessons during my first term. Even the shallow end was too deep for me to stand. The gym mistress was kind and stood in the bath supporting my chin with her hand. She could demonstrate a very good breast-stroke and impart a

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<sup>59</sup>     The Twyfordian, 7/1927, p33.

<sup>60</sup>     Gilbert Ashton, Abberley Hall 1921 - 1961 (1980), p78.

<sup>61</sup>     The Brock, Summer 1926, p5.

desire to imitate. Sadly, without her hand my face would not remain above water. One day during a class lesson the non-swimmers were taken in turn in the belt with the 'boot' man holding the pole. My effort must have been more feeble than usual and, unfortunately, coincided with a visit to the bath by 'the Bump' [the Headmaster]. Viewing my incompetence he ordered me to be pulled to the side and removed from the belt. Picking me up with his large hands he threw me into the middle of the bath. Fortunately the bath was small and a larger boy was near enough to haul me to the side."<sup>62</sup>

"R.P.Marshall made as much of the swimming pool as he did of his chapel. In truth he put the fear of God into small boys ... I was terrified of water. This was a mortal sin .... He plucked me out and carried me screaming to the deep end and threw me in and did so every Friday for some time. Each time I sank like a stone."<sup>63</sup>

After swimming, tennis came next on the list of accepted sports. There were some schools where even this pastime was denied to boys: it was a threat to cricket and the game tended to be granted "as much time as can be spared from cricket."<sup>64</sup> There was some suggestion that tennis might become a rival to 'the great game':

"It is interesting to find that some of the big public schools are now laying down tennis courts, and it will be interesting to see whether tennis will prove a serious rival to cricket in the schools."<sup>65</sup>

Yet by the end of period the status of tennis had hardly changed. At St.Ronan's only the mothers played the boys at

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<sup>62</sup> Mr.John Peel, letter 3/1992.

<sup>63</sup> Julian Critchley M.P., letters to The Brock and extracts from "Boy on a School Bench" in The Listener, 12/1979. Quoted in Fleming (1984). These memories are not unique - a Sandroyd survey respondent (no.41) wrote "I was scared stiff of the swimming bath. I still remember being made to jump into the deep end before I could swim well. Having nightmares about it for many years."

<sup>64</sup> Stouts Hill prospectus, 1937 (no pagination).

<sup>65</sup> Carmen Strigis, Summer 1922, p4.



tennis. Although Cottesmore had tennis matches against both Down House and Rottingdean these were not regular fixtures. More typical was the annual 'tennis and tea' meeting between The Wells House and Lawnside, a local girls school. This was a social rather than sporting occasion and typifies the standing of the sport: a pleasant social pastime but not a matter for serious competition. As one Old Boy noted:

"Although I won the singles at Greycliffe, my new-found prowess did not do much for my status. In those days tennis was a garden-party accomplishment and it did not form part of the prep and public school ethos."<sup>66</sup>

Other individual sports played only a minor role. Athletics took place in some schools. To avoid any distraction from cricket a few schools held their athletic sports in the Lent term but most made the day a grand occasion for the summer term: almost all boys took part, there was often a visiting speaker and perhaps the annual prize-giving. Competitors prepared over the preceding three or four days. At Twyford there were three-legged and egg and spoon races and at Cottesmore the occasion included a brass band. More social than sporting, it was noted that "everyone spent a most enjoyable afternoon."<sup>67</sup> In the richer schools the expensive courts provided for squash and fives were not well-used. Typical was this comment in The Sandroydian:

"It seems strange and very much to be regretted that the present generation of Sandroyd boys, who are so keen at other games, are not making good use of their fine Squash Racquets Courts. They seem to take this game in a childish way, and allow it to

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<sup>66</sup> Hallam Tennyson, The Haunted Mind (1984), p37.

<sup>67</sup> The Cottesmorian 12/1923, p210.

degenerate into a rag."<sup>68</sup>

A golf course was regularly laid out at Twyford for boys and masters to enjoy in their spare time. At Lambrook informal competitions between masters and boys took place and the game flourished at Beaudesert Park where it was "a most popular sport"<sup>69</sup> and "The Goodman Cup was competed for annually to decide the best individual player."<sup>70</sup> Wet weather resulted in generally unwelcomed runs. Cross-country rarely went beyond this although The Cottlesmorian reported occasional runs with Beagles. Harecroft Hall in Cumbria was probably unique in the emphasis placed on alternative sports:

"The outstanding feature of the School's outdoor life is its pursuit of those open-air sports and pastimes which are peculiarly associated with the life of an English country house.

Riding, hunting, shooting, climbing, and occasional fishing, are part and parcel of the curriculum of the School, and are in pleasant contrast with the usual unvaried round of school games."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The Sandroydian No.68 (4/1921), p19.

<sup>69</sup> Vincent Keyte, Floreat Beaudeserta (1984), p18.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934, p11.



## B O X I N G

From a modern perspective it seems extraordinary that boxing should be a sport thought not only to be suitable for small boys but one worthy of encouragement. The origin was in the public school: Tom Brown's fight is perhaps the most famous depiction of this. Its popularity stemmed from its link with character formation:

"Boxing is a sport which does a lot towards fitting a boy for his life's work. A boy who can learn to control his temper and remain master of his actions throughout a hard fight; who can set his teeth determined to go all out until the bell goes and who, when the contest is over, can cheerfully accept defeat and resume, without a trace of malice, friendly relations with his opponent, has done a lot towards strengthening his character."<sup>72</sup>

"There is probably nothing ... which can develop the best of the British national spirit - pluck and endurance - more effectively than early training with the gloves."<sup>73</sup>

Schools were quick to dismiss the suggestion that this was developing aggression:

"The main object of boxing at preparatory schools is after all not to develop pugnacious talents, but to teach a boy to take a punch on the nose without whining and to develop quick mental control of both brain and body."<sup>74</sup>

Instead they instructed:

"There are two things that every boy should have. One of them is the knowledge of self-defence; the other is self-control .... Perhaps this is manifest more in boxing than in anything else; for, while becoming proficient in the art, a boy simultaneously learns to

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<sup>72</sup> The Malsis Chronicle Vol.IV, No.27 (4/1930), p54.

<sup>73</sup> The Brock, Summer 1920, p51.

<sup>74</sup> Aymestry Magazine, Easter 1935, p23.

take his victory or defeat in a sportsmanlike manner."<sup>75</sup>

"We are sure that the boys who learnt and are learning, have benefited considerably. They are harder, more self-reliant, and have developed a self-respect which will always be useful to them and help them, should they ever find themselves in a position where self-defence is needed."<sup>76</sup>

Schools were keen that boys should take up this activity (which, it should be noted, involved the payment of an additional fee): "We should like to see every boy learning boxing, as apart from its physical results, it also has moral results on the character of those who learn."<sup>77</sup> Boys and parents were told "it does not really hurt ... even a round of one minute duration can provide as much exercise as a game of cricket lasting several hours."<sup>78</sup> While it was optional at most schools<sup>79</sup> some made it compulsory.<sup>80</sup>

The institutional perception of the value and nature of this activity varied from that of the majority of boys. Oral and written sources reported varied experiences of this violent activity. One Old Boy remembers prep being interrupted as they were summoned in pairs to report to the gym for lessons: "These interludes were welcome interruptions even if the relief

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<sup>75</sup> Beaudesert Park School Magazine Vol.2 No.4 (December 1927), p17.

<sup>76</sup> The Chronicle (Brightlands), 1920, p44.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> The Brock Summer 1920, p61.

<sup>79</sup> As a rough guide to its popularity in 1930 20 out of the 70 boys at Malsis took part.

<sup>80</sup> Beaudesert Park is one example.



from work had to be made good at some other time."<sup>81</sup> One wrote home stating "I would like to box this term, so please send my boxing gloves."<sup>82</sup> Another, however, remembered that it was:

"A pretty good pain to all of us, especially as you had to box a master occasionally to be taught, I suppose, that boxing could hurt. That was nearly as bad as boxing some of the bigger and heavier boys. There was a chap called Heathcote and he was absolutely solid - a future sort of 16 stoner I should think - and of course being hit by him anywhere was like being poleaxed. I must admit that I quite enjoyed boxing when I was up against a smaller, weaker or slower boy and I could bash him about instead of being bashed about myself."<sup>83</sup>

Others devised schemes to avoid the beatings that school magazines inadvertently reported: "Grayrigge proved himself capable of standing a lot of punishment, and his persistency had both Hampden and Lindsay groggy in turn."<sup>84</sup>

"Unknown to the authorities, my opponent and I did a 'deal' before we fought in the final. We would lay on fancy stuff for the first two rounds, and only fight in the last. So we ducked and weaved round the ring for two-thirds of the contest, never landing a real blow but drawing much applause for showing such class. By great good luck I produced the first proper punch in the third round and drew blood. My opponent was a good boxer who was not used to being hit. He went all to pieces, and it was a walkover."<sup>85</sup>

This graphic scene was described by Gavin Maxwell:

"There were a lot of bleeding noses and blubbering little boys who managed to distribute whatever blood there was over every inch of their bare torsos and white cotton shorts, and to present pictures of such abject misery that my mother decided that I should not be taught

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<sup>81</sup> Mr. John Peel, letter 3/1992.

<sup>82</sup> Letter from Michael Reynolds (Sandroyd). Sandroyd archives.

<sup>83</sup> Mr. Charles Jewell (St. Wilfrid's).

<sup>84</sup> The Cottlesmorian 7/1919, p148.

<sup>85</sup> Hon. Terence Prittie (Cheam), Through Irish Eyes (1977), p40.

### The Boys' Experience:

Clearly the boys' experience of organised games will vary according to their disposition toward the sport in question. While one might write "Games were played with gusto and were fun."<sup>87</sup> another simply "prayed for the game to be over without the ball ever coming my way."<sup>88</sup> For those less enamoured with physical expression the experience could be painful and many non-sportsmen, often more sensitive and articulate boys, have written vivid accounts of their misery. The effect of these descriptions is misleading: this minority view leads one to conclude that games were disliked and rarely enjoyed. Nothing could be further from the truth: most contributors to this research enjoyed games at prep school and for many they became a life-long interest. Contemporary sources corroborate this view. One inspection report noted that "At the very mention of their games the boys bubble over with enthusiasm."<sup>89</sup> A collection of letters home from a Sandroyd boy of the period is revealing: every letter has references to the latest or forthcoming match and the boys determination to play for the school team:

"I am fighting like the blazes for mine [colours] against a boy called Kitchener .... I have not got my colours as my rival has got them instead .... I was not playing and I am very

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<sup>86</sup> Gavin Maxwell (then at Heddon Court), The House of Elrig (1965), p63.

<sup>87</sup> Pritie (1977), p39.

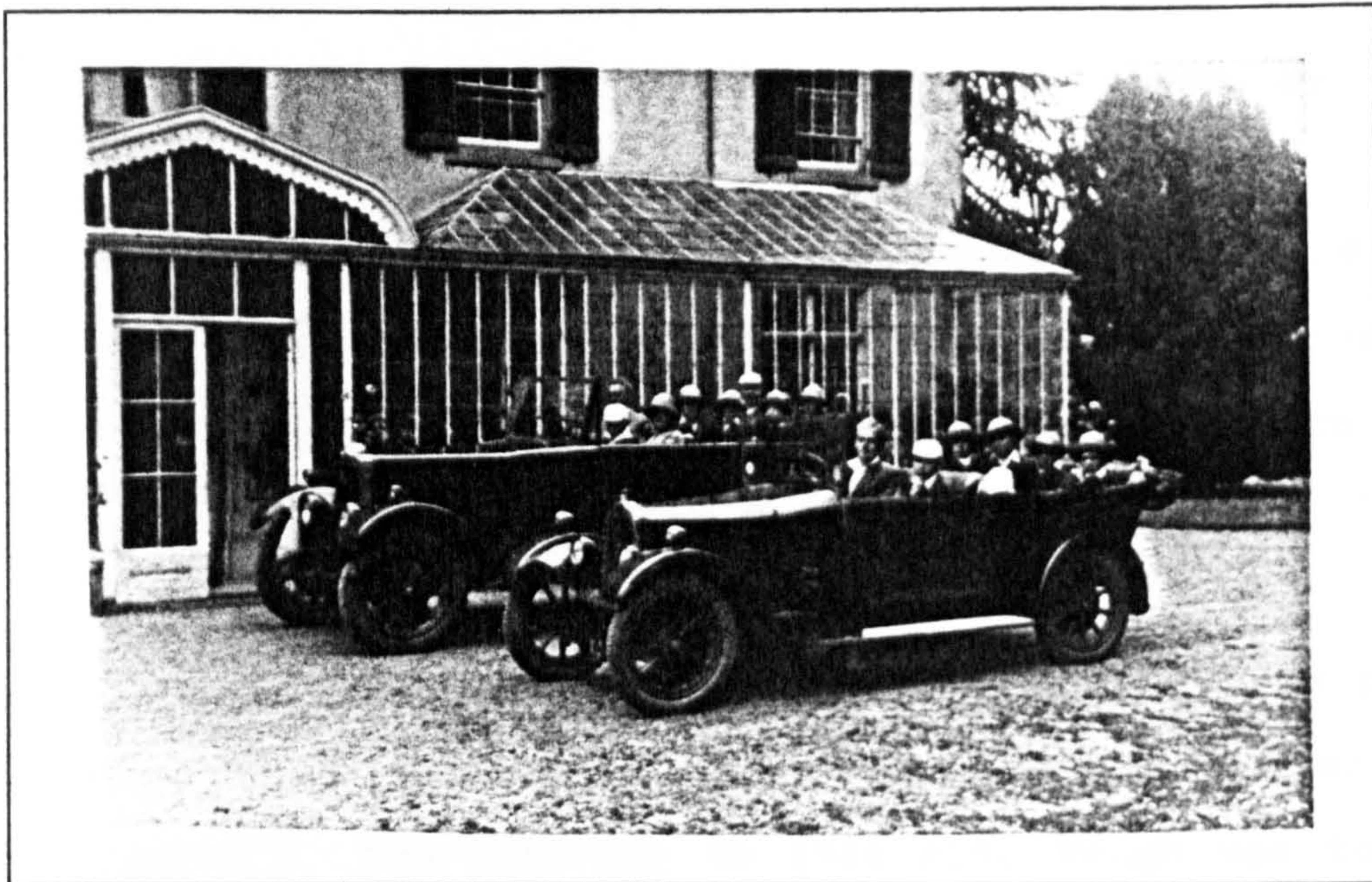
<sup>88</sup> John Mortimer, Clinging to the Wreckage (1982), p20.

<sup>89</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report on Westbury Manor, 11/1936, p7. PRO Kew ED109/242.



annoyed .... I got my colours yesterday!!!!!"<sup>90</sup>

An oral source said that "games were what we liked to talk about most."<sup>91</sup> Away matches represented real excitement.



Upton School 1st XI setting off for a match in the 1920's. (Source: Mr.R.Garne)

Prep schools cannot be reprimanded for forcing boys to take part. Many of those who disliked the experience may have been reluctant to take any form of physical exercise. Sometimes, as one headmaster pointed out, one must take part in unpleasant activities simply because it is good for you:

"if you went on the plan of excusing from games those who hated them, and were no good at them to start with, thousands of boys would be deprived in after-life of what had proved to be of untold value to their health and happiness."<sup>92</sup>

The misconceptions surrounding games in the prep school present further evidence as to the unreliability of the popular conception.

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<sup>90</sup> Letters home from Michael Reynolds (1929 - 34). Sandroyd archives.

<sup>91</sup> Lord Wigram, interview 8/1993.

<sup>92</sup> Tom Pellatt (Durnford), Boys in the Making (1936), p51.



## The Games Cult:

Few would doubt that the boys' feelings were positively influenced by the visible support given by the school authorities and rooted in the peer culture. It is this emphasis which has given rise to accusations that schools built a 'cult' around games; an environment in which games assumed an importance out of all proportion and where good games players were glorified and favoured.

In 1900 public school masters had said that in prep schools "Too much importance is attached to success or failure in games"<sup>93</sup> and although in 1924 Alec Waugh was to claim that "the cult of athleticism is absent in most preparatory schools,"<sup>94</sup> oral evidence would suggest that it continued. When asked whether there was a games cult one ex-headmaster said "I should think that was true in a great number of schools,"<sup>95</sup> and a school historian admitted "Yes, sadly, a cricket cult."<sup>96</sup> A headmaster appointed in the 1930's said "When I was at school we worshipped good games players and it took a long time to die out."<sup>97</sup> A retired master referred to "the often overpraised and overindulged athlete."<sup>98</sup> Parents also considered games important. In the contemporary prep

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<sup>93</sup> Reported in Frank Pritchard, "The history and development of boys' preparatory schools in England"; MA thesis (1938), p153.

<sup>94</sup> Alec Waugh, "The Preparatory School" in Fortnightly Review 8/1922, p826.

<sup>95</sup> Mr.Ted Vidal, interview 8/1991.

<sup>96</sup> Mrs.Isla Brownless (Lambrook), interview 5/1992.

<sup>97</sup> Mr.Geoffrey Tolson (St.Peter's, Weston-super-Mare), interview 8/1992.

<sup>98</sup> Mr.J.D.Thompson (Marlborough House), letter 3/1994.



school novel School in Private one father says "Now look here, Paul, between you and me I don't care a damn about your work, but do be a good chap and get into the first fifteen."<sup>99</sup> A contributor to the P.S.R. in 1930 wrote: "I think a freer atmosphere is needed even on the playing fields and less solemn importance attached to a boy's failure or success there."<sup>100</sup> A school magazine observed that "the demands of games ... are almost as exacting and competitive nowadays as the pursuit of the mind, and the modern prep. school has been accused by some of degenerating into a sports club."<sup>101</sup>

It was not only the place of games in the school's ethos that created such a pro-games atmosphere. An indication has already been given of headmaster's enthusiasm for specific sports and, with many of their staff also sportsmen of some note, a passion for games might be expected. The possession of an Oxbridge 'Blue' helped secure a prep school post. The Board's inspectors noted of the young staff at Lake House that "their prowess in games and all forms of athletic exercises inspires the boys with a sense of hero worship."<sup>102</sup> Some headmasters regarded sporting success as a means of judging a school's status and competition between schools was often fierce.<sup>103</sup>

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99 T.P.Toynbee, School In Private (1941), p154.

100 "Leaves from the Log of a Preparatory Schoolmaster" in P.S.R. 11/1930, p174.

101 St.Peter's, Seaford Magazine No.54 (Summer 1932), p2.

102 Board of Education Inspection Report, Lake House, 6/1933, p3. PRO Kew ED109/5947.

103 St.Cyprian's refused to play their neighbour, Cholmondley House, due to a disagreement over refereeing or umpiring. The Headmaster of Wellington House once walked onto the wicket and kicked the stumps when he felt that his team had been unfairly dismissed. A retired master recalled that on the Isle of Thanet in the 1930's "the behaviour of staff on the touchline had to be seen to be believed." (Mr.J.R.Thompson, interview 10/1993) Another headmaster, told that his cricket captain had declared at tea with what the Headmaster regarded as an inadequate score, said "Well, I undeclare." (Mr.Simon Wright)

A contemporary headmaster made the situation clear: "Games counted for a lot. You'd have the headmaster shouting at the touch line and of course all the boys had to watch."<sup>104</sup>

Staff made it clear to boys that sporting success was important. At some schools "a loss was no laughing matter."<sup>105</sup> At Horris Hill the loss of a match would incur an extra hour of prep<sup>106</sup> and at Pinewood "At the beginning of the term the Headmaster promised a day's outing if we should make 250 runs in a 1st XI match."<sup>107</sup> One Old Boy remembered "teams which won got hot sausages for tea and the others didn't."<sup>108</sup> A three-year unbeaten record at Hawtrey's was inspired by the threat of a beating for the team that lost.<sup>109</sup> A rugby game is described in the novel School In Private: "Mr.Cornell becomes more furious as the game goes on. At one moment he runs up to Johnson and slaps him hard on the buttocks: 'Get into the scrum, you lazy little swine!'"<sup>110</sup>

There were distinctions between schools. The Headmaster of The Downs claimed "The greatest mistake that can be made over the

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<sup>104</sup> Mr.Geoffrey Tolson, interview 8/1992.

<sup>105</sup> Lt.Col.B.Holloway (Stanmore Park), interview 8/1992.

<sup>106</sup> Information from Revd.R.G.Wickham, interview 11/1991.

<sup>107</sup> The Blue and Grey Summer 1921, pp32-33. They managed 209 for 5 against Earleywood and this was judged 'good enough.'

<sup>108</sup> Henry Longhurst, My Life and Soft Times (1971), p29.

<sup>109</sup> Information from Mr.Bruce McCrae (Hawtrey's staff), 3/1994.

<sup>110</sup> Toynbee (1941), p60.



games in a Preparatory School is to take them too seriously."<sup>111</sup> The authorities were not necessarily to blame for this: boy peer group priorities rated games highly. At less conventional schools such as The Downs boys were offered more avenues for self-expression and not only were individual sports encouraged but also cultural pursuits and academic prowess. One boy who was "hopeless" at cricket was allowed to have riding lessons instead.<sup>112</sup> At Huyton Hill competitive sport was down played and on a nice day all the boys might go for a bicycle ride.<sup>113</sup> Even at Sandroyd "those who were really no good were taken off by Huffer to collect kindling."<sup>114</sup> Many sources stressed that the emphasis on games differed greatly between schools. That said, there were few schools where games were not given considerable attention and one headmaster's claim that "There is usually something which needs correction in the character of a boy who takes no interest in games"<sup>115</sup> is unlikely to have been disputed.

It is these boys who tended to find the prep school experience particularly painful. All schools made team games compulsory, thus those boys unfavourably disposed toward cricket or rugger had to endure many unpleasant hours each week. Attention was usually focused on those who showed promise while others were rather neglected. At Walton Lodge they "were left to our own

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111 Hoyland (1943), p33. Yet even at this school "games reigned supreme although never a fetish" (Mr.Jim Brown, interview 10/1991) because the boys rated them so.

112 Mr.Henry Glaisyer, interview 8/1993.

113 Information from Mr.I.Butler, interview 4/1993.

114 Mr.Peter Ansdell, interview 8/1993.

115 Rannie in Dover Wilson (1928), p79.

devices to play the same game but on a second pitch without coaching .... Thus those who were not very good had little chance to improve."<sup>116</sup> Unlike contemporary public schools it seems poor games players were rarely teased or ostracised - "there wasn't a feeling of you were a wet if you weren't in the 1st XI"<sup>117</sup> and one Old Boy who always seemed to cause sporting disasters wrote that "No-one teased or jeered or was unpleasant in any way, it was simply part of life that Matthews was not an asset on the field."<sup>118</sup> However one Old Boy who later became a headmaster stated that the non-player was "inadequately provided for - nobody had thought through that one." He said that those in authority believed every boy should be involved.<sup>119</sup> Again, it is important to stress the difference between schools in their treatment of 'non-players'. Certainly there were schools where there was no alternative but to comply and participate but others helped less able players to develop alternative interests - although never allowing them to withdraw completely. One headmaster conceded:

"Some boys are born non-Cricketers .... there comes a time when one of these non-Cricketers has reached a certain stage of responsibility and is better employed in some other way than in attending cricket games which are a very real misery to him."<sup>120</sup>

For these boys the school might encourage individual sports or some form of community service. A number of schools had a school farm or kitchen gardens in which they might work. At

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<sup>116</sup> Mr.C.Boldero, letter 4/1993.

<sup>117</sup> Mr.A.R.D.Wright (The Downs), interview 8/1993.

<sup>118</sup> Geoffrey Matthews (Sandroyd), Mainly on the Bright Side (1989), p16.

<sup>119</sup> Revd.P.M.Chadwick (Manor House, Horsham and Forres), interview 9/1992.

<sup>120</sup> Hoyland (1943), p35.



Bigshotte non-players spent time digging, "said to be much preferred to the alternative, walking."<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion:

The prep school experience of games is clearly a varied one yet some broad conclusions may be reached. Games had a crucial role in all schools as a fundamental component of the dominant character-building ethos. Team games, especially cricket, received considerable attention and all boys were required to participate. For most this was an acceptable and even enjoyable aspect of school life but for non-players the status assigned to games and the compulsory participation in them was often a cause of unhappiness. With such emphasis being placed on games it is inevitable that some form of 'cult' would emerge to a greater or lesser degree dependent on the priorities of the school. Finally, evidence would suggest that there was some decline in the importance of games during the period but even in 1940 their place in the life of the boarding prep school remained a prominent one.

## 8: MATTERS ACADEMIC

*"Traditionally, the English gentleman was taught to compose verses in Latin and Greek. As this is an accomplishment beyond the capacity of any but a special few with a peculiar gift in this direction, the English gentleman was effectively taught nothing at all - except the profane values of classical authors and the lewd example of their amoral gods."*<sup>1</sup>

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### The Curriculum:

There is no doubt about the importance and status of the classics in the prep school curriculum but this commonly held conception is an inaccurate guide to the real nature of what was taught in such schools in the inter-war period. A wide range of subjects were covered in the classroom and the period encompasses a time of fundamental change in the nature of what was taught. What is true is that a huge proportion of teaching time was given to Latin and Greek compared to what these languages receive today.

A census of 43 schools conducted in 1895 revealed that 45% of the teaching time was devoted to Classics and a mere 4% to English.<sup>2</sup> Similar statistics for the 1918 - 40 period are unobtainable but it is clear that classics continued to enjoy an important status. Brightlands was not unusual in placing

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Soames and Duncan Steen; The Essential Englishman; Cassell, London, 1989. p21.

<sup>2</sup> "Preparatory School Curriculum" in P.S.R., 7/1895, p4.



Latin first in its subject orders<sup>3</sup>. At Pinewood 30% of the final order was derived from marks gained in Latin<sup>4</sup>. Both Sandroyd and Cottesmore report forms allocated a third of their space to Latin and Greek and placed them at the top of the page. Analysis of the St.Cyprian's timetable shows that up to 9.5 out of 28 hours total teaching time was given to Latin<sup>5</sup> and at Horris Hill it exceeded 50%<sup>6</sup>. A similar situation existed at most schools.

The importance of classics was traditional. Its origin may be traced back to the Medieval period when familiarity with Latin was the mark of a scholar and all writing was in that language. In the early nineteenth century it had enjoyed a revival in conjunction with the study of the classical world, thereby also including Greek. Latin had become the language of the educated and the elite. In analyzing public schools David Newsome wrote of a "devotion to a classical curriculum"<sup>7</sup> and such an emphasis is an accepted aspect of public school education. Even after the First World War a knowledge of Classics was necessary for entry to Oxbridge and the Civil or Colonial Service. A retired headmaster referred to "Classics, the pillar upon which our civilisation rested."<sup>8</sup> As a component of the educational system of the English elite it was

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<sup>3</sup> See Brightlands Chronicle.

<sup>4</sup> School order and marks; The Blue and Grey (Pinewood School magazine), Spring 1924, pp22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Figures for form VA at St.Cyprian's, 1934: Latin - 6 hours of school and 3.5 hours of prep. Source: private book in Temple Grove School archives.

<sup>6</sup> Information from Mr.Jimmy Stow (ex-Headmaster).

<sup>7</sup> David Newsome; Godliness and Good Learning; (1961), p62.

<sup>8</sup> Mr.J.E.Engleheart (Moffats).

inevitable that the value placed on classics at public school and university level should filter down to the prep school. Many headmasters did not seek to rationalise this but simply accepted it as a fact of life, a part of the social system to which they belonged. One, whose degree was in English and Maths, remembered being told at interview "We don't want anyone to know about that."<sup>9</sup> Of course most of them were products of the same system, often with classical degrees. They tended to be intrinsically conservative and happy to maintain an education with which they were familiar. A contemporary writer noted that they found it difficult to give up for "It is the subject most beloved by most Preparatory School masters, and ipso facto, it is the subject best taught in their schools."<sup>10</sup> When interviewed, old headmasters were quick to expound what they saw as the benefits: its value as a mental discipline, in "making you think"<sup>11</sup>, the understanding of grammar and the foundation it gave for other languages.

"It shaped his mind, trained his powers of thought, gave him a whole lot of ideas and conceptions and understandings, which are now so much part of the framework of his thinking and feeling, that he cannot trace them to their origins .... is there anything that can take the place of a page of Ovid ... as an exercise in applying rules and principles, practising powers of inference and of logical deduction? Can any modern languages, analytic as English is, show up by contrast the real processes of thought as Latin (or

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<sup>9</sup> Information from Mrs. Isla Brownless (Lambrook).

<sup>10</sup> Frank Pritchard, "The history and development of boys' preparatory schools in England"; MA thesis (1938), p312.

<sup>11</sup> Mr. M. D. Rogerson (Cottesmore).



Greek) can? Is there any way half so satisfactory of forcing the Junior School to think?"<sup>12</sup>

Even some Board of Education inspectors were prepared to agree: "Naturally Latin ... (has) to be kept in the foreground."<sup>13</sup> The most powerful argument in favour of classics was their importance in achieving the central goal of prep school education: entry to public school. The fact was "Pass in classics and you'd get in."<sup>14</sup>

A contributor to the P.S.R. in 1920 wrote that "at the present time [Latin] seemed to be the only Paper in which it was necessary to qualify."<sup>15</sup> This view was supported later by the headmaster of West Hayes:

"it is unnecessary to justify or condemn the retention of Latin and mathematics<sup>16</sup> as the basis of training for all our boys, for, as has been said, these matters are decided for us by the public schools who set us a double standard - scholarships for our better boys, and a Common Entrance Examination for our ordinary product."<sup>17</sup>

The headmaster of Temple Grove made it quite clear that he saw his educational objective simply to do what was needed in order to move the boy to a higher level and noted that if "the higher powers were to constitute an examination in Swahili, without

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<sup>12</sup> J.W.Parr in P.S.R., 6/1933; pp398-399.

<sup>13</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Westbury Manor 11/1936. PRO Kew, ED109/242.

<sup>14</sup> Revd.R.G.Wickham (headmaster Twyford 1937 - 63, Chairman of IAPS 1963), talking of Marlborough.

<sup>15</sup> P.S.R. 3/1920, p121.

<sup>16</sup> Mathematics came a poor second behind Latin in occupying most of the curriculum.

<sup>17</sup> Alan Rannie, "The Preparatory School" in J.Dover Wilson (Ed.); The Schools of England; (1928), p67.

doubt the Headmaster would import a nigger master to accommodate the class with a pure Swahili accent."<sup>18</sup>

The Common Entrance exam had been instituted in 1904 to standardize entry requirements to public schools. Accompanying it had been the demise of Greek as a compulsory subject<sup>19</sup> but Latin remained firmly entrenched. Common Entrance had its critics from the start. They objected principally to the prescriptive nature of the curriculum and the encouragement it inadvertently gave to cramming. It was, however, a considerable improvement on the earlier state of affairs and soon became the established means of screening public school entrants. Subjects and the way in which they were taught were closely linked to the requirements of Common Entrance: written French, a lack of practical Geography, essay writing in English and, above all, an extremely high standard in Latin. The prep school curriculum became "tied and bound"<sup>20</sup> to the syllabuses it prescribed. A writer to the T.E.S. longed for the Utopian prep school which could not be while "our great secondary schools demand ... each child's head upon a charger, dished up with snippets: grammatical definitions, dates of kings, populations of cities; ability to answer time-worn examination 'catches' and to reproduce memorised formulae and crammed-up facts."<sup>21</sup>

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18 Temple Grove Magazine, 7/1919 (no.16), p2.

19 Although one still considered necessary for a scholarship.

20 Our Magazine (Newlands, Seaford), No.30 (Xmas 1933), p1.

21 T.E.S., 30/12/1922, pp565-566.



Opponents of the pre-eminence of Latin made regular protests throughout the inter-war years. Critics ranged between those vehemently opposed to Latin - "Personally I would go as far as to say that compulsory Latin is morally wrong, and physically detrimental to many brains."<sup>22</sup> - to those who simply sought a reduction in the time devoted to it:

"The boy of quite ordinary intelligence can reach easily the very reasonable standard required by most Public Schools in their entrance examination, and therefore we need not be cramped by concentrating too much attention on subjects that may have little real educational value."<sup>23</sup>

Opposition to Latin as the basis for the curriculum gathered pace during the 1930s. Two major speeches to the IAPS conference in 1932 advocated the dropping of Latin and its replacement by English. The comment that "The number of teaching units in Classics is unnecessarily large"<sup>24</sup> was frequently made in Inspection Reports<sup>25</sup> and the pages of the P.S.R. began to fill with debate. An article in 1933 was headed the "Tyranny of Latin."<sup>26</sup> Dr.Cyril Norwood, the headmaster of Harrow, stated clearly his belief in English as the basis for the education of Englishmen. At the 1936 conference the reformists made their case clear:

"They were proposing to substitute for the classical tradition what they believed to be an even greater and sterner tradition than that imposed by the classics - the education of a boy

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22 J.D.W. in letter to P.S.R. 11/1935, p174.

23 G.A.Watken in Parents Review, p297.

24 Board of Education Inspection Report on Summer Fields, 3/1942, p4. PRO Kew ED109/4881.

25 This compares with the comment in a 1904 report that the curriculum was "well suited to the age, class, and requirements" of the boys. Board of Education Inspection Report, St.Clare, Walmer, Kent 12/1904. PRO Kew ED109/2618.

26 P.S.R., 6/1933, p397.

in his mother tongue. They would make all that he learned subordinate to a thorough training in speech, reading and writing, which was conceived to be the true aim of a boy's education at his preparatory school. English was to be the spine of the curriculum and other subjects must take their proper place in relation to it"<sup>27</sup>

The movement climaxed in what Arthur Harrison later dubbed the "Great Debate at the 1937 Conference."<sup>28</sup> Although the final conclusion was in favour of exploration and gradual change rather than immediate reform the revisionists argument had been successful: English was to replace Latin as the basis of the preparatory curriculum - a policy which a number of schools had already adopted. In the prospectus of Stouts Hill, then just founded, it was written: "In the curriculum, particular attention is paid to English, Mathematics and French."<sup>29</sup> The victory was not total. When the new headmaster of Summer Fields announced he had 'modern' ideas on education he was forced to resign and the old head wrote the school "is improving, now that they have got rid of the youngest Alington with his modernside ideas and hatred of Classics."<sup>30</sup>

Opposition to Common Entrance was not founded solely upon its emphasis on Latin but also for the way it dictated the curriculum and encouraged schools to teach for the exam. Cyril Norwood wrote:

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27 "The Preparatory Schools. Proposed Changes in Curricula. Value of English." in The Times, 23/12/1936.

28 R.A.Harrison, How Was That, Sir?, (1975) p61.

29 Stouts Hill, Uley, Nr.Dursley, Glos. Prospectus, 1937 (no pagination).

30 Quoted in Nicholas Aldridge; Time to Spare? A History of Summer Fields; (1989) p121.



"I hold the personal view that much harm is done by the Common Entrance Examination to the boarding schools .... A great many of the preparatory schools direct their teaching wholly to this examination, for they cannot afford to have their boys fail. There are some who instruct - I cannot use the word educate - wholly by means of old examination papers. In any case, the object aimed at is to give a boy of thirteen the faculty of putting down knowledge in snippet form on all the subjects which he learns, in rapid succession during space of two days, and he naturally regards this as the intellectual end of education .... the process is deadening, and renders real education impossible."<sup>31</sup>

His view was supported by the Board of Education's inspectors who regularly criticised the "restricted scope of the curriculum"<sup>32</sup> and the fact that "the time-table contains little provision for hand or eye training nor is there much opportunity for the development of the aesthetic or imaginative faculties."<sup>33</sup> and "gives little opportunity for emotional or aesthetic training, and little encouragement to the constructive powers."<sup>34</sup>

The claim of the prep schools that Common Entrance was competitive had been denied by the public schools<sup>35</sup> but there was a severe shortage of places at public schools in the 1920s and there seems little doubt that good Common Entrance results were what was needed to secure entry to the best schools. One headmaster wrote "It is obvious on the face of it, that the examination is fiercely competitive. The struggle between the

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<sup>31</sup> Cyril Norwood (then Headmaster of Harrow); "The Boys' Boarding School" in J.Dover Wilson (1928); p130.

<sup>32</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Aldeburgh Lodge 2/1931, p4. PRO Kew ED109/5403.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, Hurst Court, 11/1929, p4. PRO Kew ED109/6148.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Aysgarth, 5/1935, p4. PRO Kew ED109/6932.

<sup>35</sup> See P.S.R., 1922.

rival preparatory schools to capture the boy market is cut-throat"<sup>36</sup> That said, failure in the exam was a rare event and the Headmaster of Twyford wrote "that the examination is not stiff enough to provide much of a test for the better boys."<sup>37</sup> Similarly allowances could often be made, particularly if there were family connections with the school.<sup>38</sup> However the prospect of failure and the consequent damage to the schools reputation makes it hardly surprising that many prep schools sacrificed what might be considered modern educational good practise for examination success. At some schools the pressure was not merely to pass but to pass well: one Eastbourne headmaster "thought that an Ascham boy has not done his duty unless he gets a place in the upper half of the Entrance List."<sup>39</sup> An observer noted that "even to-day parents tend to support a School with good examination results in preference to a School which has everything to recommend it apart from such results."<sup>40</sup> Much of the blame for this unsatisfactory state of affairs lay with the public schools who set the exam and their entry criteria.

"This examination is the affair of the public schools: they must impose some tests on those who wish to come to them: they have chosen this test, and the ultimate responsibility for the nature of the Examination rests, and must rest, with them."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> T.Pellatt, Boys in the Making, (1936) p170.

<sup>37</sup> The Twyfordian 1/1923, p5.

<sup>38</sup> One source said "I didn't bother much with C.E.: I was going to Bootham as my father had before me." Henry Glaisyer (The Downs).

<sup>39</sup> Ascham St.Vincent's Chronicle, No.25 (May 1924), p2.

<sup>40</sup> Pritchard (1938), p300.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Rendall in P.S.R. 7/1928, p464.



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### Scholarships:

Success in the Common Entrance exam was not the only means of obtaining entry to a senior school. For prep schools the ultimate objective was the public school scholarship. As Alec Waugh observed:

"The success of a preparatory school depends largely on the energy and personality of one man, and the scholars are, after all, his exhibition blooms."<sup>43</sup>

Other writers note that "above all else, [the headmaster] wanted to create successful scholarship boys, to add to the lustre of the school and his own teaching reputation"<sup>44</sup> and that scholarships were "after all, one of the main measurements of a school's standing in the preparatory school's League Table."<sup>45</sup> Scholarship winners were feted, with the school obtaining extra half-holidays in their honour and their names emblazoned in gold upon the honours board.

This success did not come easily. The Headmaster of Sandroyd wrote in The Sandroydian:

"One or two small boys have been heard to remark that they, like their fore runners, mean to head the Roll [Winchester election]. That is splendid. They must however keep in mind that success is not gained by bowing three times to every new moon, but that they have got to fill each unforgiving minute at School with sixty seconds' worth of liveliness in something worth doing."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Alec Waugh, "The Preparatory School" in Fortnightly Review, 8/1922, p827.

<sup>44</sup> Mr D.H.G.Lyon (The Old Ride and Beaudesert Park), letter 11/1992.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Longhurst, My Life and Soft Times, (1971) p33.

<sup>46</sup> The Sandroydian, No.69 - August 1921; p4.



Often extra tuition was arranged - both at school and in the holidays. Many old boys have vivid memories of their scholarship work:

"We were trained like race horses for scholarships, returning a week early for our final summer term."<sup>47</sup>

"We were given our grammar or vocabulary to learn before breakfast, at breakfast itself, and at other convenient gaps in the working day."<sup>48</sup>

"when I fell into the scholarship track he [the Headmaster] soon reduced me to a state of nervous collapse .... For those unfortunate enough to have been spotted as scholarship material the pressure did not ease even during the holidays. Bags would look up our homes on the map, find some place more or less equidistant between them where he would take rooms and require me to report for coaching sessions. I do not think I have ever worked so hard and so continuously as I did under Hayman between the ages of eleven and fourteen."<sup>49</sup>

Intensive learning such as this might easily be labelled "cramming". Critics of the exam and the techniques used by a number of headmasters to gain scholarship success were quick to seize on this:

"I have come to the conclusion that we are not educating our young charges at all, but just cramming them with what is most likely to pay in the requirements of examinations."<sup>50</sup>

"The preparatory scholar is more often than not a hothouse product. He has drawn on his reserves too early; his mind has been forced into a groove at the start. He is trained like a pet Pomeranian, and he is kept in blinkers; he is not allowed to explore by-paths that

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Tupper in Q.T.G. Newsletter (Temple Grove), 1990.

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Slade quoted in Aldridge (1989), p126.

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Priestland (Winchester House); Something Understood, (1986) p30.

<sup>50</sup> "Leaves from the Log of a Preparatory Schoolmaster" in P.S.R., 11/1930, p174.

are of interest to him. That would be prejudicial to his chances. He has to keep on the straight road of scholarship."<sup>51</sup>

Old Boys of those schools which regularly acquired scholarships acknowledge that they did receive intensive extra tuition.<sup>52</sup> Opinion is divided over whether this was damaging or not. The Scholarship exams, while extremely difficult, were not easy to cram for. Alongside excellence in Latin and Greek, they required a broad knowledge of many other subjects and it was necessary for the examinee to apply this knowledge in a more sophisticated way than the mere repetition often required by Common Entrance. One headmaster claimed that his "plan was to work this kind of boy hardly at all; he just did it, like falling off a chair."<sup>53</sup> However in most schools the pressure placed on young boys was intense, often too much so, and invariably their involvement in games and extra-curricular activities was reduced in order to focus on matters academic. Some schools went out of their way to stress that their boys obtained scholarships in their stride<sup>54</sup> but there can be few that were prepared to resist the temptation to give promising individuals some additional preparation. Public schools who failed to look for real scholarship ability beyond excellence

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51      Waugh (1922); p828.

52      "Summer Fields of those days had no namby pamby ideas about not cramming its scholarship candidates for their examination." Christopher Hollis in A Century of Summer Fields, p109.

53      T.Pellatt (Durnford), Boys in the Making, (1936) p203.

54      "... Scholarships were taken almost without any extra tuition of the cramming order. The School work and games are so organised that there is little opportunity for doing extra work without interfering with other subjects such as music and singing, which we consider too important for a boy's well-being to be lightly curtailed ... and we make every effort to see that each boy gets his full share of time at play in the open air and do not on principle bring in a promising boy to do extra work when he should be out of doors. The result, we believe, is a clearer brain and a healthier body which will enable a boy to continue progressively strengthening his mental faculties at a Public School and not create the inevitable reaction which results from overtaxing the powers at a very important stage in a boy's growth." Brightlands Chronicle, 1926, pp12-13.



in classics often found that scholars failed to deliver their promise when pressure and intensive tuition ceased.<sup>55</sup>

### Organisation of the curriculum:

Exactly what the boys were taught, and how the school intended to reach it's objectives, was rarely written down. Time-table and subject organisation were often not clearly specified or thought out. Evelyn Waugh wrote of the prep school at which he taught:

"It is the most curiously run school that I ever heard of. No time tables nor syllabuses nor nothing. Banks [the Headmaster] just wanders into the common room and says "There are some boys in that class room. I think they are the first or perhaps the fourth. Will someone go and teach them Maths or Latin or something."<sup>56</sup>

And at another school it was only in the 1920s that a new member of staff:

"was responsible for the first Time Table at St.Ninian's to replace the archaic custom of meeting at the foot of the private stairs each morning for a decision to be taken as to how the six periods of the day would be allocated. This system precluded the possibility of any member of staff knowing when, if ever, he or she would have a half-day."<sup>57</sup>

In the majority of schools teaching duties were more clearly defined than this and staff at least knew what classes they were expected to teach and when. As with the curriculum, changes to this timetable were only exceptionally made. One source remembered the timetable as being yellow with age.<sup>58</sup>

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55 Ashdown House, which had an excellent record in gaining scholarships, was nicknamed 'Crashdown House' in the public school world for the boys who had gained awards rarely seemed to reach such standards again.

56 Letter from Evelyn Waugh (at Arnold House, Llanddulas) to Catherine Waugh. Quoted in Mark Amory (Ed.); The Letters of Evelyn Waugh; Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1980. p21.

57 John Peel (St.Ninian's, Moffat), letter 3/1992.

58 Information from Hugh Griffith (headmaster of Aymestry) talking of Aldeburgh Lodge, 10/1991.

Aspects of school life such as the structure of the day and length of the lessons were decided by what was usual or traditional.

Inspectors were often critical of the lack of clearly defined written syllabuses. Comments similar to "The School suffers to some extent from a certain indefiniteness due to the absence of well-defined syllabuses of work"<sup>59</sup> appear in many contemporary inspection reports. Most teachers had their own personal programme of study well worked out but this was not a school document and opportunities for co-operation and cross-curricular work were few and far between. The problem was most acutely apparent with new or inexperienced teachers who often had little guidance as to what or how they were expected to teach. Given that they were not professionally trained, and staff changes could be frequent, this was a serious deficiency. The division of the curriculum into clearly defined and separate subjects, usually with specialists for each, did lead to high standards but precluded project work or study that spanned several subjects.

### Inspections:

It was not mandatory for prep schools to be inspected. The first inspections had been made at the beginning of the century but by invitation only and it was in the late 1920s and 1930s that inspection of prep schools became a regular occurrence. Until 1914 the Board of Education charged prep schools for

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59 Board of Education Inspection Report, Durlston Court 7/1931. PRO Kew ED109/1085.



inspection and it was not until 1931, when the IAPS made inspection a condition of new membership, that inspection became a regular event. The headmaster of Aldeburgh Lodge wrote that this "was not perhaps such an ordeal as had been anticipated"<sup>60</sup> and generally the inspectors were favourably impressed with what they saw. It was extremely rare for them not to recognise a school as "efficient". They were critical of the narrowness of the curriculum, the "bookish" nature of the courses and believed Latin and French were started at too young an age. Most headmasters seemed ready to implement suggested changes within the confines imposed by Common Entrance. Comments such as "He was effusive - far too effusive - both in his welcome of us and in his gratitude for our suggestions, and we cannot believe in his genuineness."<sup>61</sup> were infrequent.

#### The teaching environment and nature of teaching:

The classroom environment in which teaching took place was very different from the colourful and comfortable rooms of the modern school. Photographs of contemporary classrooms show them to be fairly bleak places, with rows of desks facing a dominating blackboard. Such an environment was not unique to prep schools and inspectors never commented other than to suggest that they were sometimes rather small and poorly main-

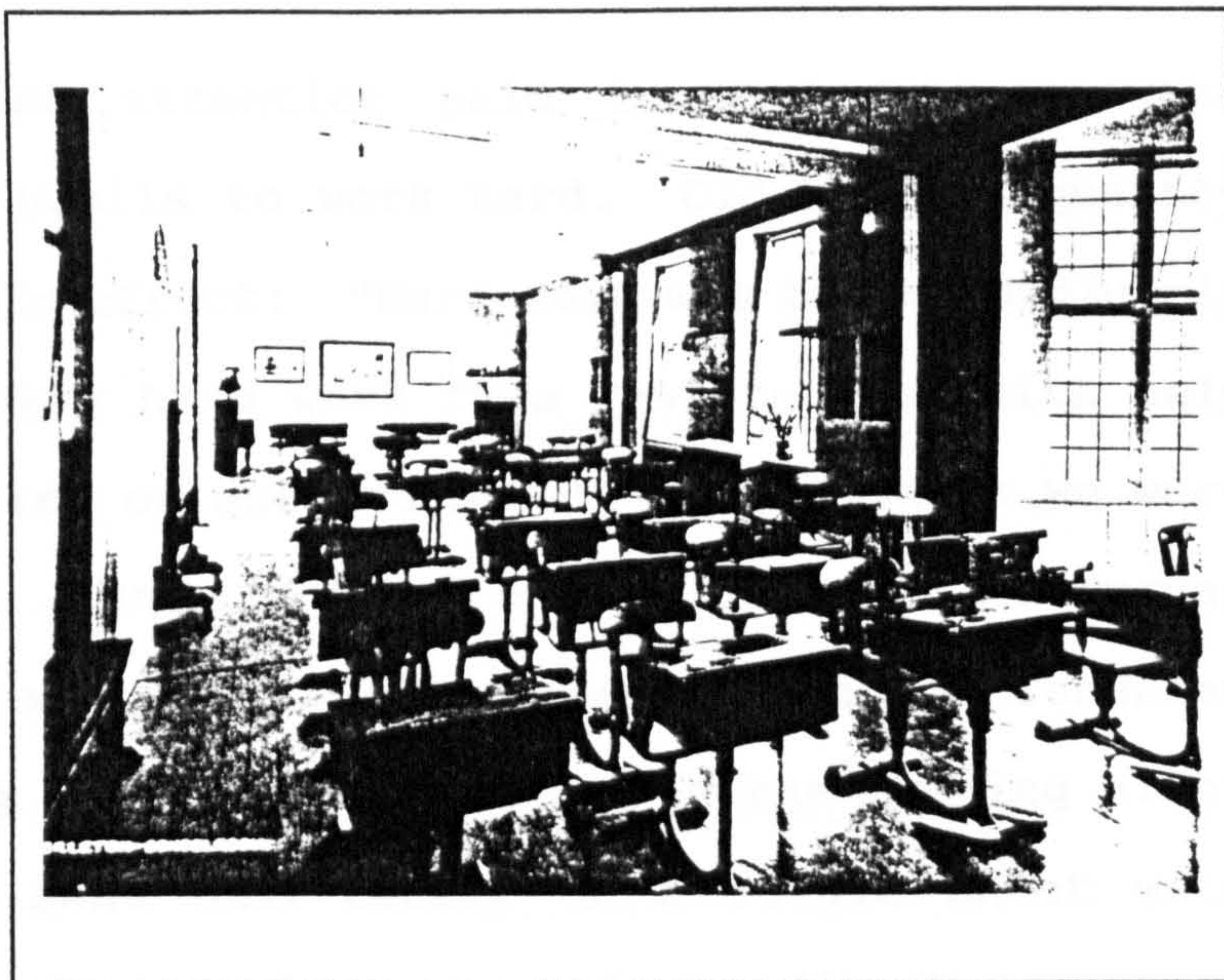
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<sup>60</sup> Aldeburgh Lodge Magazine, Vol.6 No.8 - Summer 1921. p497.

<sup>61</sup> Inspectors square bracket confidential notes on their inspection of Beaumont House, 3/1930. PRO Kew ED109/2075.



tained<sup>62</sup> or that the blackboard needed to be larger or easier to see. More than one retired headmaster pointed out that money tended to be spent elsewhere and that provided the quality of work was good they were not



A classroom at Orleton, Scarborough. (Source: Book of Views - personal papers of Maj.Gen.R.D.Wilson.)

unduly concerned about the newness of the desks or paint on the walls. By 1940 there were few schools which continued to use one large school-room shared by different classes. Class sizes were small and the teacher - pupil ratio very high.<sup>63</sup> Individual attention was a feature of the schools:

"Close tuition in work and games is guaranteed. The numbers in each class are kept small so that each boy's work may be conveniently examined and corrected in class, and frequent explanations of method may be given to, and by, each boy separately during the period."<sup>64</sup>

"Every effort is made to develop to the full the powers of each individual boy and to encourage the diligence and perseverance in his work which will enable him to take a good place in his next school."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See general comments from Board of Education Inspectors and the IAPS. Reported as "Kindly Criticism" in P.S.R. 11/1934, p36.

<sup>63</sup> Averaging, for example, 11 boys at The Downs, Colwall.

<sup>64</sup> Extract from Stouts Hill prospectus; Op.Cit.

<sup>65</sup> Extract from The Downs, Colwall prospectus, June 1934 (no pagination).



Concomitant with the attention paid to each boy was the pressure placed on pupils to work hard. Old boys frequently made comments to this effect: "Hard work was taken absolutely for granted."<sup>66</sup>; "Very hard work from dawn to dusk with only short time for hobbies or mucking about."<sup>67</sup>; "I think we were worked fairly hard. I know we had a half-holiday on a Saturday afternoon but that was really rather wet because I remember there was something like a reading hour in the evening after tea."<sup>68</sup> Reports, sent half-termly on a single sheet with space for each subject and a comment by the headmaster, praised such endeavour and encouraged even harder effort: "He is still young but we must see even greater courage and determination. Whatever it costs him, he must strain every muscle"<sup>69</sup> Prep could over-run into precious free-time and book reading and essay writing tasks, to be done out of class, were commonplace. Many schools set work for the holidays or at least expected boys to return with something to show for their free-time.<sup>70</sup>

Most Old Boys remembered that "The teaching was strictly on conventional methods - no frills. There was nothing trendy or advanced. The aim was to pass examinations at the end of each term and year."<sup>71</sup> and this is supported by contemporary

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<sup>66</sup> The Downs Survey, respondent no.29.

<sup>67</sup> Sandroyd Survey, respondent no.76.

<sup>68</sup> Information supplied by Mr.Charles Jewell (St.Wilfrid's).

<sup>69</sup> Headmasters comment on Michael Reynolds (Sandroyd), dd.6/4/1932.

<sup>70</sup> For example, this extract from The Brock (Brockhurst magazine), Summer 1930, p22: "As usual no holiday task is set, but all boys are expected to show that they have made some use of their spare time."

<sup>71</sup> Mr.C.Boldero (Walton Lodge), letter 4/1993.

evidence such as this advertisement for Thorpe Hall: "Modern methods are used, but only those which have received the sanction of many years' experiment." While the 1931 Consultative Committee on The Primary School had reported: "we see that the curriculum is to be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than of knowledge to be acquired and facts to be stored,"<sup>72</sup> this was not the case in most prep schools. Staff ignored practical involvement or even the need for understanding and taught rules and techniques that were to be slavishly followed.

"Whether or not the whole business was of the slightest interest to the pupil was not the point. The teaching resolved itself into the perpetual reiteration of elementary rules, an insistence on these rules being observed ... and exercises, and into testing the work prepared on the previous evening."<sup>73</sup>

As one old boy put it, "We weren't encouraged to show initiative; we just had to learn."<sup>74</sup>

Sometimes schools tried to justify this. Responding to criticism that school involved the learning of "dull facts" the Headmaster of Aysgarth retorted:

"The mere storage of these things is not an advantage in itself, but it is necessary exercise to expand the storehouse of the mind and make the mind quick to grasp more interesting valuable facts, which become our mental stock in trade when we go out into the world."<sup>75</sup>

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72 Report of The Consultative Committee on The Primary School; (1931) p93.

73 J.H.Simpson, Schoolmasters Harvest, (1940) p18.

74 Lord Wigram (Sandroyd), interview 8/1993.

75 Sports Day speech reported in Aysgarth School Magazine; Vol.6, No.46 - 8/1931, p632.



New teachers coming to the profession in the period did bring new ideas and a more enlightened approach but the pace of change was slow. L.A.G.Strong gives a good description of his time at Summer Fields in the 1920s:

"Most of the staff at Summer Fields had been there a long time, and the discipline was rigid to the point of harshness. Beatings were common, and the high standard of classical scholarship derived almost as much from fear as it did from the system of teaching. The system had been thought out by a mind which, having experienced great difficulty in its own youth, understood all too well the errors into which young minds were likely to fall, and insured against them. Before attempting to translate any sentence of Latin or Greek, the boys were taught to bracket off all subordinate clauses, to underline all words that went together, and mark the mood and tense of every verb. This method, while it guarded against enthusiasm and carelessness, tended to produce anxious and pedestrian translation. But it paid."<sup>76</sup>

A huge number of Old Boys' memories support this view:

"The method of teaching was absolutely overlaid by learning things by heart and by terrorisation. The only reason I worked was the extremely unpleasant consequences of not doing so."<sup>77</sup>

"Harold could come into class looking like a thunder-cloud, breathing heavily, and jingling the keys or coins in his pockets. Then we were hauled out to stand in a line in front of his desk to answer grammar questions or construe a piece of Latin or Greek. We had to 'take places' - to move up or down the line - if we got the answers right or wrong. If we were particularly bad there might come an explosion, and it was not unknown for an unfortunate to be hauled straight off to the study and be given four of the best."<sup>78</sup>

"The Headmaster, let's call him 'Thwackum', was a large, powerful and floridly handsome man in his fifties. He ruled the school with a rod of birch. His good-natured

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<sup>76</sup> L.A.G.Strong; Green Memory; (1961) pp197-198.

<sup>77</sup> Information supplied by Mr.Charles Jewell (St.Wilfrid's, Hawkhurst).

<sup>78</sup> Revd. Robert Wickham; Shades of the Prison House (Twyford history); (1986) p111.

wife, universally known as 'Mar-bub', was as terrified of him as we were. Thwackum had only one interest, his pupils' success at Eton. He could not understand any abilities not directly associated with the achievement of an Eton scholarship, and a boy's capacity at Latin or Greek was the measure of everything else. Science, modern languages, the world of the imagination - all these were irrelevant. He apparently never realised that the different capacities of different boys were not subject to the will of the boys concerned: a failure in classics was thus a moral failure and the only possible cause was idleness or obstinacy."<sup>79</sup>

Boys were routinely punished for mistakes made and the threat of physical pain was a powerful inducement. One headmaster spoke of the "natural aversion of a boy to hard work"<sup>80</sup> and the need to "make life unpleasant for the slacker."<sup>81</sup> At Dorset House "The boy who was able but idle soon found that a blow with a Meccano metal strip across the palm of the hand was anything but pleasant."<sup>82</sup> Surprisingly, most Old Boys do not resent being taught in this way and are even grateful for how it spurred them on. This even includes the geometry teacher in one of the case study schools who "had a large pail of compasses for drawing circles on the blackboard. His punishment was bending you over and jamming the spike into your backside."<sup>83</sup> or the Old Boy who recalls "My regular half-term caning with a slipper - to improve my Latin."<sup>84</sup> After noting

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<sup>79</sup> Hallam Tennyson; The Haunted Mind; (1984) p30.

<sup>80</sup> Headmaster's speech reported in Heddon Court Magazine, No.80 (10/1926), p7.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p8.

<sup>82</sup> L.W.T., "Dorset House 1914 - 1921"; manuscript in Dorset House School archives.

<sup>83</sup> The Downs Survey, respondent no.20.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, no.47.



the peculiar punishment of his English teacher which involved being grasped by the jacket lapels and being propelled rapidly backwards and forwards another contributor noted that "The possibility of these indignities kept us alert and in no way hindered us from acquiring a lasting love of the language"<sup>85</sup> As one writer put it: "It is easy at this distance to scoff at the outlook and methods of these teachers [but].... their methods paid."<sup>86</sup>

Other significant incentives to work hard existed. "Plus and minus" schemes, as described later in the chapter on discipline, were regularly implemented to encourage and reward good work in the classroom (as well as punish bad). At some schools this could be quite elaborate:

"Each boy possesses a *Chart* on which is recorded the progress of his work throughout the term. A duplicate chart is kept in the Staff Room, and once a fortnight it is marked up by the Staff .... a boy's standard of work for each subject is recorded on the chart by a grade. In addition to this the amount of effort a boy puts into his work is indicated by a colour .... At the end of the fortnight each boy copies his colours and grades on to his own chart, which he keeps in his desk, and the original is then returned to the Staff Room."<sup>87</sup>

Most schools had a system of weekly, fortnightly or termly orders. Good positions were energetically sought and were reported in the regular Sunday letter home. They made work very competitive:

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<sup>85</sup> Mr. John Peel (St. Ninian's), letter dd.3/1992.

<sup>86</sup> Strong (1961); p200.

<sup>87</sup> W. Frazer Hoyland (The Downs); Aedificandum Est.; (1943) p17.

"I think I ought to beat him at the end of term if I get on as well as I have been but Oldred seems to be pulling up his socks and he is gradually beating me as he is ahead of me these three weeks."<sup>88</sup>

These orders were often published in the magazine. Indeed, apart from cricket notes this is all some magazines contained.<sup>89</sup> A few schools went even further, publishing academic reports by subject or class similar to sports reports:

"CLASS III: Class III were rather in and out. Harper, Crick mi and Greenfield worked splendidly, but

Marsden made little improvement, and Cookson and Bruce were most disappointing, neither of them really taking anything like enough trouble over their work."<sup>90</sup>

Prizes and rewards were given to those achieving top honours. At prep school hard work was not ridiculed and while the great games player might enjoy higher status, academic prowess was

SANDROYD.

FORM. V

WEEK ENDING..... June. 21. 1924.

1.	Richards.	140
2.	Ommarney.	132.
3.	Paul.	129.
4.	Merz.	126.
5.	Gwynne.	124.
6.	{ Palmer mi Bailey Norman.	106.
9.	Tulloch. mi.	107.
10.	Burnett.	100.
11.	VERE mi	90.
	ABS. Kay. Shuttleworth.	

E.M.S.

A typical weekly order. Sandroyd, 1924. (Source: the personal papers of F.B.Richards.)

<sup>88</sup> Letter home from Michael Burn (Belvedere), aged 8; personal papers.

<sup>89</sup> This is true of the Sunningdale School Notes. This included even the most appalling results, of which these, from the December 1920 General Paper, were typical: 1. Ritchie 44.1%; 10. Hogg 31.6%; 20. Boothby 26.5%; 30. Akers-Douglas 20.0%; 40. Sillem 15.8%; 50. Russell mi 12.9%; 62. Hopton 2.8%! Sunningdale School Notes, 12/1920 - no page numbers.

<sup>90</sup> St. Ronan's Magazine, 2/1934; p23.



respected. The statement that "There is a tremendous keenness on work for work's sake"<sup>91</sup> would have been true for most schools. Boys wanted approval from their masters, to please their parents with a good report and to pass creditably into their public school.

The fact that the nature of teaching was "Latin or taught in the same way as Latin"<sup>92</sup> and that "Everything has to be sacrificed to the fetish of written work within the narrowest limits,"<sup>93</sup> did come in for criticism.<sup>94</sup> A contemporary writer observed that in some schools "The master tells the boys what to think and do, and does not lead them on to learn for themselves what to think and do."<sup>95</sup> Inspectors also complained about didactic and boring teaching. They noted the "lack of breadth and dexterity in the teaching methods"<sup>96</sup> in some schools and periodically suggested a more lively approach that more fully involved the pupils: "The value of brisk and frequent oral work and of class discussion in exhibiting knowledge, resolving difficulties and in stimulating effort is great, but it was not much in evidence."<sup>97</sup> Generally, however, they were satisfied with the way by which the boys were taught and noted the high standards which they attained.

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<sup>91</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934; p3.

<sup>92</sup> Mr. Jimmy Stow (Horris Hill), interview 7/1991.

<sup>93</sup> "Leaves from the Log of a Preparatory Schoolmaster" in P.S.R. 11/1930, p174.

<sup>94</sup> Although this was also in the classical tradition. The symbol of the schoolmaster had for long been the cane and he was expected to stand at the front and lecture his pupils.

<sup>95</sup> Pritchard (1938), p303.

<sup>96</sup> Report on Aldeburgh Lodge; Op.Cit.; p4.

<sup>97</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Aysgarth, 5/1935, p5. PRO Kew ED109/6932.

The importance of good results was such that poor schools were unable to survive for long.

#### EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS IN THE PREP SCHOOL:

As independent schools, usually privately owned and with a minimum of state control, the prep school was in an almost ideal position to experiment with alternative forms of education. Independent schools in this period were at the forefront of educational experimentation - from the agricultural basis of Clayesmore to the liberalism of Bedales. For prep schools there was one considerable restraining factor: the demands of Common Entrance. For most schools the necessity of ensuring that boys passed this examination precluded any radical departure from the educational norm. However, as alternative public schools emerged some feeder schools<sup>98</sup> were prepared to adopt different ways of educating their boys.

#### The Dalton Plan:

Of the various ideas tried out in the period it was the Dalton Plan which received the widest acceptance. At Pinewood this was embraced for history and latin:

"In brief, each boy is given a typed 'Assignment' consisting of several 'units' of work, or reading in various books, which will take him four or five days or a week; he is left almost complete freedom in getting it done, though a master is always present to be consulted over real difficulties; when ready, the work is heard and passed, and ticked off



on a chart which readily shows what progress has been made; as each boy finishes an assignment he applies for the next."<sup>99</sup>

The rationale behind it was also explained:

"... it has proved to be more interesting for the boy; and while he picks up no less 'Common Entrance' knowledge he gains more real knowledge than under the ordinary class system. It gives him more freedom and a measure of responsibility; he finds knowledge for himself rather than having it served up ready; it allows him to travel at his own best pace."<sup>100</sup>

In 1930 a paper entitled "The Dalton Plan in a Preparatory School" was sent to the IAPS and a contributor to the P.S.R. noted "There seems to be nothing but approval on the boys' part for the change made."<sup>101</sup> A new school, financed by debentures, was established at Abinger Hill near Dorking in Surrey to operate wholly under the Dalton Plan, following the example set by the new public school of Bryanston. The Dalton Plan had the advantage of being different without being too far removed from standard practice - alternative rather than radical. This suited prep. schools and their conservative customers. As one historian put it: "It offered the shelter of the progressive's umbrella to the uncertain teacher who realised that the old shelters were no longer secure, but it did not require him to forsake all his old ways."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> The Blue and Grey (Pinewood magazine), Winter 1928, p4.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> P.S.R., 11/1930, p158.

<sup>102</sup> R.J.W.Selleck, English Primary Education and the Progressives, 1914 - 1939, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972, p154.

The philosophy seemed admirable and in theory the plan might have worked. In reality the experience was different. Peregrine Worsthorpe attended Abinger Hill:

"This meant that the children could plan their own academic curriculum, it being left to them to decide which subjects to concentrate on most. My favourites were English and History, to the exclusion of the Classics and Mathematics. The idea was that one would work best at what one wanted to learn most. For some boys, with greater powers of self-discipline, this seemed to work quite well, but for me it was academically disastrous"<sup>103</sup>

The inspectors of the Board of Education were initially very interested in the experiment but their final verdict was less than satisfactory. They concluded that "It is not certain that small boys can make the best use of such complete independence."<sup>104</sup> and that "In the opinion of the Inspectors the Dalton plan has great disadvantages"<sup>105</sup>. Their reservations were manifold: the lack of collective teaching meant that children had less opportunity to learn from the teacher and each other, it was harder for the teacher to maintain standards, it was too difficult for younger children to master, groundwork in subjects such as Mathematics could not be properly laid, it made the gulf between the strongest and weakest boys even greater and boys could not gain clear knowledge from what they had studied. They did not want independent work to disappear altogether but decided that it was a system "which does not show tangible good results."<sup>106</sup>

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103 Peregrine Worsthorpe, "Boy made Man" in George Macdonald Fraser (Intro.); The World of the Public School; (1977) p83.

104 Inspectors confidential square bracket notes on the inspection of Port Regis, 10/1929, p3. PRO Kew ED109/2286.

105 Board of Education Inspection Report, Abinger Hill, 10/1930. PRO Kew ED109/5673.

106 Notes on Port Regis; Op.Cit.



This was a view supported by those who taught in the system: one commented, "I hardly saw my classes but became a marking machine."<sup>107</sup>

This poor assessment meant that after the initial flurry of interest in the Plan in the late 1920s and early 30s many schools reverted to their old techniques:<sup>108</sup>

"the Head Master soon came to the conclusion that his boys were too young to be able to undertake individual work with success, and modification was in no long time followed by disappearance. The work as a whole would certainly seem to have benefited by the change."<sup>109</sup>

#### Quaker Schools:

In the nineteenth century the different Quaker religious and moral position had led them to establish their own public schools. Of these Leighton Park and Bootham are perhaps the most famous. It soon became clear that it would be advantageous to have prep schools to complete the educational system. The most famous of these was The Downs, Colwall, whose headmaster was the innovative Geoffrey Hoyland:

"Geoffrey Hoyland's philosophy on education was that it should be designed on the widest possible front, so that every boy should find something that interested him and in which he could excel."<sup>110</sup>

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107 Mr.J.R.Thompson (Marlborough House), letter 9/1993.

108 Newlands, Seaford was one of many schools to do so. After an initial flurry of interest in which it was reported to be "working well" (Our Magazine, No.25 (Easter 1932), p1) within two years it had been abandoned.

109 Board of Education Inspection Report, Port Regis, 10/1936, p3. PRO Kew ED109/2287.

110 E.J.Brown; The First Five (1987), p29.

The philosophy that education involved more than simply the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills was present in all boarding prep schools, it was inherent in their very nature, but at Quaker schools like The Downs this idea was carried much further. In the academic sense this entailed a broader and more modern curriculum; a programme of study where boys were encouraged to think for themselves and pursue their own interests. Hoyland wrote:

"One of the primary functions of the system of education at a Preparatory School should be to teach the boys how to learn, and this cannot be done by any species of spoon feeding."<sup>111</sup>

English was of great importance and was complemented by considerable emphasis on art, music and natural history. Unusual yet talented staff were employed<sup>112</sup>; societies flourished and the boys had much greater freedom than was usual.

The curriculum at The Downs was in many ways considerably ahead of its time and a forerunner of that which evolved in 'ordinary' schools in the 1960s. As such it was regarded with suspicion by other headmasters, and probably most upper middle class parents, although the school was strongly supported by members of the Society of Friends and influential Quaker businessmen.<sup>113</sup> The Downs was fortunate in that it was able

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<sup>111</sup> Hoyland (1943). This was, in fact, written by Geoffrey Hoyland's half brother Frazer who replaced him as headmaster in 1940. He maintained Geoffrey's tradition.

<sup>112</sup> W.H.Auden taught English, Maurice Feild (sic) art and Willy Soukop sculpture.

<sup>113</sup> Geoffrey Hoyland's wife, Dorothea, was a Cadbury and considerable finance came from that direction.



to feed directly to public schools ready to receive boys prepared in this way.<sup>114</sup> As one Old Downian wrote:

"I fear that much of what was best about The Downs would be difficult to combine with achieving the entrance standards expected by the top Public Schools."<sup>115</sup>

### Bryant and St.Piran's, Maidenhead

Encouraged by the scientific emphasis of Sanderson at Oundle, in 1919 Major Vernon Seymour Bryant founded St.Piran's with the philosophy:

"Knowledge must be acquired scientifically, by means of demonstration and experiment, regardless of the subject. Maths, for example, should be 'practical and utilitarian', while foreign languages should be learnt one at a time by the natural method, much as one would acquire one's mother tongue. He envisaged the total integration of all subject disciplines into an education providing each boy with a fund of literate and numerate skills which would 'stimulate the spirit of enquiry' and ensure an 'intellectual whole'."<sup>116</sup>

To this end he lavishly equipped his school with the latest in scientific apparatus, including an engineering workshop (with a collection of machine tools run by a gas engine), laboratory, wireless room, technical library and a photographic developing room. All these were actively run by experts in their field. As at The Downs, voluntary societies were integral to the system and along with those listed above they included natural history, gardening and choral and dramatic groups. The literary society published its own

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114 Specifically Leighton Park, Bootham and Bryanston.

115 The Downs Survey, respondent no.60.

116 David R.Briggs; The Millstone Race (1983), p97.

magazine, about which H.G.Wells remarked: "I think it at once amazing."<sup>117</sup>

His venture was supported by Sanderson and those seeking what was viewed as a modern approach to prep education. One Professor of Chemistry explained:

"After considering and inspecting a large number of schools, I made St.Piran's the ultimate choice as here, and here alone, could I find the mental outlook and spirit for which I sought, where the urge of modern life and thought lived throughout the school, where the old worn-out tradition had been replaced by vision and a modern outlook."<sup>118</sup>

Bryant had to admit there were problems with his system, centring, yet again, around the constraints of Common Entrance. With the exception of schools like Oundle and new foundations such as Canford and Stowe it was difficult to adequately prepare boys. He was forced to include Latin in his syllabus even though he thought it "not only educationally unsound but almost criminal."<sup>119</sup> He railed against Common Entrance, exclaiming that "This examination does not require reforming; it needs abolishing. It exerts a paralysing influence upon the whole of prep school teaching."<sup>120</sup> He was well aware that he would have to forego any chance of gaining public school scholarships.

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117 Ibid.

118 Ibid; p106.

119 As quoted in ibid, p101.

120 Ibid.



Although initially successful, Bryant's vision was ultimately a failure. Sanderson departed from Oundle and Bryant did not enjoy the same close relationship with Fisher, his successor; it was difficult to find suitably qualified staff; his wife felt the project too ambitious and Bryant himself, stressed and unable to delegate, took to drink. Rumours spread, numbers fell and he was forced to sell. The new Headmaster was not so interested and desired a more academic and formal approach. The emphasis on science remained but the total philosophy was abandoned.

#### Other alternatives:

Beyond these more famous examples, there existed many schools which offered different approaches to the task of educating young boys. Sometimes this only involved the addition of other subjects or activities, perhaps a complicated punishment and reward system or greater involvement with the outside world. Some simply wanted to escape from the close focus on Common Entrance and the narrow, heavily classical, education which this entailed. The headmaster of Huyton Hill, near Liverpool, wanted to give boys a broad education and did not want to specialise or pressurise an individual. This position was supported by the inspectors:

"A praiseworthy feature is the broad and balanced basis of the curriculum, and whilst this may mean it is less likely that any but those who can take it in their stride will win Scholarships, it nevertheless ensures a much healthier general training for the majority of

the boys and is far more likely to contribute to their real education than a curriculum designed with Scholarship winning as one of its prime aims."<sup>121</sup>

A more peculiar alternative was offered at Harecroft Hall, on the Cumbrian coast. This was advertised as a school "frankly designed for the sons of country gentlemen, and of other gentlefolk who believe in English country life, and in riding and manly outdoor pursuits."<sup>122</sup> The headmaster wanted to develop outward bound characteristics in his young charges:

"desirable characteristics of self-dependence, reliability, common-sense, fitness, dependability and all that goes with the enjoyment of a variety of country pastimes."<sup>123</sup>

Inevitably because of this academic standards suffered, parents became disheartened with the ideal - boys were taken away to be crammed for Common Entrance and new boys were hard to obtain. The school survived, but only just.

Finally some mention should be made of the Parents National Educational Union (P.N.E.U.). Their progressive ideas began to filter into some schools, particularly among the younger boys. An example was Wavertree where "The teacher acts in an advisory capacity and offers suggestions. All the actual knowledge is gleaned by the boys themselves from books with the teacher as consultant when required."<sup>124</sup> Schools such as these were many years ahead of the Plowden Report.

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121 Information from Mr.I.Butler (son of headmaster), interview 4/1993 and also Board of Education Inspection Report, Huyton Hill, 6/1939, p6. PRO Kew ED109/2961.

122 Extract from Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934; p2.

123 Information from Major-General Dare Wilson, interview 8/1992.

124 Reported in Pritchard (1938), p280.



One school sometimes considered to be alternative in its approach was the Dragon in Oxford. With around 200 pupils the school was much larger than normal; some of the pupils were girls<sup>125</sup> and staff were known by nicknames. Boys were supposed to be involved in the running of the school and the management style laidback. This myth must be addressed. The curriculum at the Dragon was the same as all other prep schools (albeit with additional emphasis on science) and the style of teaching did not differ in any respect. "Pressure in the classroom," the school historian wrote, "was openly approved of".<sup>126</sup> The organisation of the curriculum was, in fact, rather old fashioned: the whole school studied the same subject at the same time regardless of teachers particular talents. The only girls permitted were sisters of boys in the school. Their enrolment was discouraged and they were treated as if they were boys, including playing rugby and cricket. Staff were treated with the same respect as most prep schools and corporal punishment was readily used to enforce discipline. Boys had no real say in school management and, while 'Skipper' Lynam may have been a relaxed and open headmaster, his son 'Hum' who took over in the 1920s was certainly not. The only aspects of the Dragon which made it especially different were the large numbers, the fact that these included many sons of Oxford Dons and that half of the boys were day boys.

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125 This had been "regarded as a pretty startling innovation" (C.H.Jacques, A Dragon Century (1977), p72) and the response was slow. The proportion of girls was always very small. At their peak in 1938 they only constituted 12% of pupils.

126 Jacques (1977), p128.

### Coping with different abilities:

To fulfil their objective of maximising individuals' abilities it was important that the prep school extended the minds of their boys. The nature of working toward the ultimate prep school goal, a public school scholarship, has already been described but even for the less able boys the structure of the school was designed to ensure that they were worked to the full. Class promotion - a "remove" - was keenly sought but boys were only moved up according to academic merit. Removes on the grounds of age were rare. This meant that able boys could move up the school rapidly, spending as little as one term in each form and clever young boys could reach the upper forms relatively rapidly. For example, at Brockhurst in 1923 the bottom form had 11 year olds in it while there was a 10 year old in the top form. Generally older boys did tend to be in the upper forms, thanks to greater maturity of thought and a more substantial body of accumulated knowledge, but the opportunity and incentive for young and clever children to progress quickly certainly existed.

For the less intelligent the organisation by ability could be embarrassing and, if their parents had chosen an academic school, life could be hard: "I was a plodder and slow. I tried very hard but some masters were intolerant and impatient. It was all O.K. if you were clever."<sup>127</sup> Fortunately the experience of John Le Mesurier at Grenham House was unique. He remembers, "My humiliation as a frequent wearer of the dunce's



cap - a real dunce's cap, pointed and with a big D on its side - was compounded by the teasing and cruel jokes of my peers."<sup>128</sup> At some schools less able boys were simply expected to 'keep trying'. At Scaitcliffe "The school never did anything" for the less able<sup>129</sup> and they were told to have holiday tutoring in order to keep up. Most schools were aware that even the less able would have to pass Common Entrance at some stage and made efforts to help them progress. The most important thing was to direct them toward a suitable public school - not always easy given parental expectations. Time could be taken to give them extra coaching; at Beaudesert Park this took place while the scholars learnt Greek.<sup>130</sup> At Sandroyd there was a special class, ignominiously dubbed 'the idiotics', who were taught by a master expert at maximising their abilities<sup>131</sup>. The inspectors approved of such a plan: at Horris Hill they noted:

"The problem of catering for the special needs and treatment of backward boys - boys whose minds move slowly and whose capacity for assimilating knowledge is below the normal standard - is successfully solved. They are grouped together in a special class and attention is directed to their special needs."<sup>132</sup>

Others argue that the old fashioned methods used in the period suited the less able boy. Although dyslexia was not recognised the emphasis on sheer learning and rote may have suited boys

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128 John Le Mesurier; A Jobbing Actor; (1984) p10.

129 Information from Mr. Richard Vickers (Son of headmaster and then headmaster of Scaitcliffe); interview 4/1992.

130 Information from Mrs E. Keyte (daughter and wife of headmasters of Beaudesert Park and at the school herself); interview 11/1991.

131 In the survey many boys remembered this man with considerable gratitude. They did not seem to mind being in the class but felt an affinity with each other and were grateful for the special attention they received.

132 Board of Education Inspection Report, Horris Hill, 7/1929, p4. PRO Kew ED109/1861.

with this and other educational problems. Classes were small so the teacher had time to devote to any difficulties experienced by individuals. It is worth noting that most boys arrived at prep school having already been well-prepared at their pre-prep (known then as a kindergarten) or by a governess. One contributor noted there was "No question of boys not being able to read or write properly"<sup>133</sup> after the grounding they received from the mistresses in charge of the first year.

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<sup>133</sup> Information from E.Keyte; Op.Cit.



### Classics:

As has been seen, it is only the occasional school which would be so bold as to claim :

"Classics are not taught until a fair standard of proficiency is obtained in general subjects ... it is primarily endeavoured to make boys express their ideas correctly in their own words."<sup>134</sup>

Far more typical would be the school attended by Eustan More, who said "The study of Latin was almost the modus vivendi of my prep school."<sup>135</sup>

The course in Latin was very full indeed. Grammar was covered in tremendous detail and many hours were devoted to learning lists of Latin words. Exercises, mostly in sentence form, usually involved translating into and out of Latin. Translation from English into Latin is now very rare but was commonplace in this period. At most schools a text book was strictly adhered to and the sentences to translate were spectacularly dull. The object was to simply grind each new syntactical form into the pupil by dint of constant repetition. Latin poetry, fiendishly difficult to translate thanks to its complex word order, was included in the course<sup>136</sup> and mastered, as with the rest of the Latin syllabus, only by regular and lengthy practice and repetition.<sup>137</sup> Old Boys agree:

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<sup>134</sup> Beachborough Park prospectus, 1930s; school archives.

<sup>135</sup> Eustan More; Oranges At Half-Time; (1967) p16.

<sup>136</sup> At Sandroyd boys even had to compose Latin verse. Information from Lord Wigram. Apparently Sandroyd was not unique in this respect.

<sup>137</sup> I am grateful to Mr.A.J.Brisbane for advise on the nature of the course.

"Classics, of course, ruled supreme and the basis of Hayman's classics teaching was the flawless memorisation of every possible tense and declension .... The school hummed all day with the sound of incantation, like a Tibetan monastery, and when class was over the boys set to work memorising more for the next day. We took two or three grammars to bed with us for those precious moments before the light went out. We woke up early in the summer to memorise some more .... And at breakfast we were not merely permitted but encouraged to eat with our grammars propped open in front of us: *Aggo, ackso, eeggaggon, eeka, eegmai, eechtheen - Hurray!*"<sup>138</sup>

"He was a brilliant teacher of Latin and was known for the number of scholarships he had obtained at top public schools. His methods may now appear somewhat crude, for although they were staggeringly successful in implanting an indelible knowledge of Latin grammar, they achieved no success at all in teaching Latin as a history or a literature or a culture. He was concerned solely with North and Hillard and Kennedy's Revised Latin Primer, the contents of which he rammed into us by the sternest discipline and with unrelenting and brainwashing repetition .... he absolutely lived and breathed Latin .... He made us learn Kennedy's grammar by heart. Particularly the rules of syntax at the back, the prepositional phrases and the gender rhymes. We learned definitions, examples and exceptions till we could all say them all in our sleep. They had no reference outside the pages of the grammar, however, and I can recall no conscious attempt to interpret them in any kind of living context. They were learned like parts of a play: sentences, titles, quotations and tags with no apparent relevance at all."<sup>139</sup>

Confronted by this, new boys were, initially, bemused. Learning the First Declension, in which mensa could mean "O table", Winston Churchill recalls asking when one would want to address a table, only to be reprimanded for his

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138 Priestland (1986), p29.

139 More (1978); pp19-20.



impertinence in asking such a question.<sup>140</sup> Another "can't still remember how, after only a few days at the school, it suddenly occurred to me to wonder who spoke Latin, the language we were being taught as our priority. I looked up in the atlas and decided that it must be the Latvians."<sup>141</sup> The inspectors were not amused. They often bemoaned the amount of time given over to Latin, referring to the "very liberal allowance of time for the subject,"<sup>142</sup> and felt that it was begun too early, before boys had any degree of mastery over their own language. They were keen to break away from boring translation, recommending that "A very simple reading book, with continuous stories, would be welcomed by the beginners as a change from short, detached sentences"<sup>143</sup> and that the boys "should see, hear and read as much Latin as possible [within the course] ... and plenty of expressive reading aloud of Latin."<sup>144</sup> Despite this, most schools continued to teach Latin in the way that guaranteed the best results in public school examinations.

By 1918 the heyday of Greek was over. From 1908 it was no longer a compulsory subject for Common Entrance and was retained only for public school scholarships. Very academic schools such as Winchester clung to the idea that Greek was essential but for most it was a language barely touched on:

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140 Winston L.S.Churchill; My Early Life; (1930) pp22-26.

141 Richard Ingrams (West Downs), "Prison of Health" (A review of Mark Hitchens, West Downs) in The Daily Telegraph, London, 11/1992.

142 Board of Education Inspection Report, Durlston Court, 7/1931; p4. PRO Kew ED109/1085.

143 Ibid, Harecroft Hall, 12/1934; p5. School archives.

144 Ibid, Westbury Manor, 11/1936; p6. PRO Kew ED109/242.

"Greek was optional which meant that one's father decided whether or not you did it."<sup>145</sup> It was, as the inspectors put it, an "uneconomic" subject<sup>146</sup> and one that would be dropped if not for P.S.S.

### English:

English was the subject earmarked to topple Latin from its prominent position, something which, to some extent, had been achieved by 1940.<sup>147</sup> This was not, however, a rapid process and no matter how much a school might support the move it was never easy. This comment from an inspectors report sums up a typical situation:

"Theoretically the Head Master and his staff recognise the importance of English as a constituent part of the curriculum, but in practice the subject receives comparatively short shrift, the bare minimum of serious attention, and an insignificant place on the timetable. The explanation of the limited respect it inspires is to be found in the fact that for the purposes of the Common Entrance Examination a high degree of proficiency in English appears to be of relatively little importance. Its subordination has, therefore, to be recognised as a practical business proposition."<sup>148</sup>

Some headmasters argued that English could be divided into grammar, composition and literature. They maintained that Latin taught grammar by the intense analysis of classical prose before translation and composition by the rendering of Latin

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<sup>145</sup> Jewell; Op.Cit.

<sup>146</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Aysgarth, 1922; p3. PRO Kew ED109/6931.

<sup>147</sup> Although this did depend on the Public School. Several Public Schools, notably Eton and Winchester, continued to insist upon the superiority of the Classics until the 1960s.

<sup>148</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Bigshotte, 5/1932; p3. PRO Kew ED109/179.



into its English equivalent. Literature, it was claimed, could be covered by encouraging reading outside the classroom.

At the majority of schools the time allocated to English was limited. At Aldeburgh Lodge the bottom form received 11.5 hours per week but by the top it was just 1.5<sup>149</sup> The 4 periods per week at Westbury Manor were described as "liberal".<sup>150</sup> Another source reported its status was "very minor"<sup>151</sup>.

To compound the problem the subject was often taught by a classics master at the end of a classics period. These graduates in dead languages were given little guidance as to how to instruct in a live one.<sup>152</sup> Even where they were experts the task was not an easy one:

"To teach boys to write essays was a real problem, the greater because it called for a violation of all the other teaching they received. The basis of that teaching was one of the most profitless transactions known to man, whereby the pupil reproduces exactly what the teacher has said, without making any personal addition to it .... The last thing expected of any Summer Fields boy was to have ideas of his own, or draw independent conclusions from the ideas dinned into him. yet, if he was to write essays, this was exactly what he had to do. I had therefore, in one department only, to goad my class into rebelling against the way they were taught. It took a long time to persuade them that their own opinions were not only interesting but essential, and that the English examiners at Eton

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149 Ibid, Aldeburgh Lodge, 2/1931; p3. PRO Kew ED109/5403.

150 Ibid, Westbury Manor, 11/1936; p5. PRO Kew ED109/242.

151 Information from Stow; Op.Cit.

152 Information from Mr.Simon Wright (Emsworth House); interview 6/1991.

wanted to know, not only what they had been taught, but what they were able to learn;  
what sort of minds they had."<sup>153</sup>

At some schools truly great English teachers did exist. W.H.Auden at The Downs was one such man. His style was eccentric but succeeded in arousing considerable talent in his subjects. "Mr.Auden told me to take a pencil-sharpener in my hand and think about it for five minutes. It is in the shape of a pistol, but it is broken. Here are my thoughts about it ..."<sup>154</sup>

There were schools where the value of English was fully appreciated. One school advertised that: "Good English is considered essential, great attention is paid to Handwriting, and boys are encouraged to read good literature."<sup>155</sup> Another headmaster wrote in his magazine editorial:

"The Report on the teaching of English, which was printed in the most prominent position in a recent issue of the 'Times', must have given untold pleasure to those who have laboured these twenty years and more to get the mother tongue and its magnificent literature recognised as *the* most important subject of education, especially in elementary schools."<sup>156</sup>

Some took time to explain their philosophy:

"Our prose literature they must in the main tackle in their own time - but poetry, which is the art of language in its most vivid and often most condensed form, can be included in the timetable for each and every form. It stimulates the imagination, quickens percep-

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<sup>153</sup> Strong (1961), pp198-199.

<sup>154</sup> J.Liff (10) in The Badger (The Downs, Colwall magazine), Autumn 1933; p22.

<sup>155</sup> Advertisement for St.Michael's, Seaford in Schools 1937; p565.

<sup>156</sup> The Blue and Grey (Pinewood), Winter 1921; p15.



tion, leads many a boy to concentrate who would else read with the eye only as it were, and helps to train him to distinguish true from false and the beautiful from the ugly .... Time was when such pursuits were, thanks to a foolish prejudice of the last century, unknown in Public Schools except to a very few: this state of things is fortunately changing rapidly and it will change more quickly still if the Preparatory School with its abundant opportunities does its duty."<sup>157</sup>

As the period wore on English gradually gained a greater importance. By 1938 the Board of Education's inspectors were able to write: "That this important subject is receiving such serious attention and is meeting with so much success is highly satisfactory."<sup>158</sup> New headmasters, free from the shackles of classical tradition, began to encourage English and allocate more time to it. Old traditions died hard. One public school headmaster wrote to a young Old Boy who had recently become a prep school head: "What is this English I hear you teach nowadays?"<sup>159</sup>

Although at The Downs the headmaster wrote: "The ultimate aim of the English syllabus is to teach a boy to appreciate, to speak, and to write good English" the English syllabus at most schools emphasised grammar, spelling and knowledge of literature rather than creative English skills. A contemporary writer noted that "The art of speaking and reading well ... [had] been badly neglected in Preparatory Schools."<sup>160</sup> At

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<sup>157</sup> Brightlands Chronicle, 1924; pp30-31.

<sup>158</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Temple Grove, 5/1938; p4. School archives.

<sup>159</sup> Information from Wickham interview; Op.Cit.

<sup>160</sup> Pritchard (1938), p296.

St. Wilfrid's it "included poetry, bits of Shakespeare and bloody boring books like Dickens and Carlyle."<sup>161</sup> The inspectors were keen on the analysis of poetry and its learning by heart. Harecroft Hall claimed "The teaching of handwriting, spelling, and scrupulous neatness in all written work, is one of the very strong points of the classroom training."<sup>162</sup> But, while the inspectors thought handwriting and presentation were important, they noted that it was not often of a good standard. An examination of penmanship at Sandroyd reveals that the standard in the 1920s would be only just acceptable today.

Correct spelling was important. Boys at The Wells House spent five minutes each day learning spelling lists, Cottesmore had inter-set spelling competitions, and Nevill Holt had spelling matches against Mostyn House.<sup>163</sup> The Temple Grove magazine reported on the Preparatory Schools' Spelling League Competition in which 93 schools each entered an XI who were then tested on 100 words: "Schools were ranked out of a possible 1100. Commonest mistakes were accommodate, keenness, violoncello, eighthly."<sup>164</sup>

Regular plays accounted for the drama component of the syllabus. English skills were often employed in other aspects of life at boarding prep school. For example, the common

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<sup>161</sup> Information from Jewell; Op.Cit.

<sup>162</sup> Harecroft Hall prospectus, 1934; p3.

<sup>163</sup> Condescend! (Nevill Holt magazine), Vol.1 No.3 - 3rd term 1927; p3.

<sup>164</sup> Temple Grove Magazine, No.39 - 11/1927; pp2-3.



practice of senior boys reading in chapel can be seen as a form of public speaking.

Where creative English was tackled it was usually in the form of essays. Lambrook had a prize story competition in which boys worked in pairs to produce a story which was then printed in the magazine. These could often run to over 5000 words and in 1938 the boys wrote a total of 56,893 words! The inter-school Navy League Essay Competition was one of worthy titles - that for 1929 was 'The Foundations of English Sea Power'. The inspectors were a little wary of such tasks, fearing that the English skills of young boys were insufficient and that particularly at the lower end of the school boys were being introduced to essay writing too early.

Reading was a valued pastime and was emphasised more so than today. Libraries, albeit ones sometimes filled with dusty old tomes, were a feature of good schools and, interestingly, were an aspect of school life enjoyed in the case study schools. Many commented that "You had to read some improving book"<sup>165</sup> and schools not only checked what boys read but prevented 'unsuitable' literature from being brought in. Even in the liberal atmosphere of The Downs comics and cheap literature were banned because "It is easy for the lazy boy to form a habit of merely turning over the pages to look at pictures if this type of literature is always available to him, and so not to learn to read a continuous story."<sup>166</sup> Boys were

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<sup>165</sup> Jewell; Op.Cit.

<sup>166</sup> Hoyland (1943), p20.

expected to take reading books up to their dormitories in the evening for a pre-lights-out reading session and time was allocated during the week for this purpose.

### Mathematics:

While Classics and English contended for the top place in the order of subject priorities, Maths tended to remain a secure second or third: "It was important in a way but it didn't have the clout the classics had."<sup>167</sup> Although one inspection report noted, "The teaching shows little evidence of acquaintance with methods which have been introduced during the last twenty years"<sup>168</sup>, the inspectors were generally pleased with what they saw. The principal recommendation was that there be "frequent oral drill"<sup>169</sup>, for Mathematics, as with many other subjects at prep school, was taught in accordance with a long-standing 'chalk-and-talk' tradition. The headmaster of South Lodge School at Lowestoft was an ex-public school teacher so appalled at the standard of maths in new entrants he had decided to teach in a prep school to investigate the situation. He stayed on and won a reputation for securing Mathematics scholarships.<sup>170</sup> Other retired teachers spoken to felt that the teaching of Mathematics had not changed greatly. The opinion of those who experienced it was usually divided according to whether it was a subject which

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<sup>167</sup> Vickers interview; Op.Cit.

<sup>168</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Beaumont House, 3/1930; p5. PRO Kew ED109/2075.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, Cothill House, 2/1930; p4. PRO Kew ED109/42.

<sup>170</sup> Information supplied by Mr.Donald Sewell (son of headmaster and ex-headmaster of South Lodge/Old Buckenham Hall); interview 12/1992.



they enjoyed. In the case studies the qualities of the Maths teachers were highly regarded even by those for the whom the subject carried little appeal.

### French:

"There seems to be practically no ear or speech training ... it appeared that very little use of the language is made for conversational purposes .... It cannot be said that by the methods at present in use French is treated as a living language."<sup>171</sup>

This was true of the teaching of French in a great many prep schools. "French," one retired headmaster said, "was taught as if it was Latin only some idiots still spoke it."<sup>172</sup> The textbooks in use were dry and boring and the whole emphasis was on the written French necessary for Common Entrance. One Old Boy remembered only the "tremendous emphasis on learning French regular and irregular verbs. We learnt them practically totally."<sup>173</sup> The inspectors disapproved and, as with Latin, were quick to state that "Nothing would be lost and something might be gained if the language were begun later than at present ..."<sup>174</sup> and that "undoubtedly this is too early to begin a foreign language."<sup>175</sup>

A few schools shared the example of Beachborough, where "Conversational French is taught and every effort is made to

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<sup>171</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Durlston Court, 7/1931. PRO Kew ED109/1085.

<sup>172</sup> Stow; Op.Cit.

<sup>173</sup> Lord Wigram, Op.Cit.

<sup>174</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, The Downs, Colwall, 6/1939. PRO Kew ED109/1971.

<sup>175</sup> Board of Education Inspection Report, Belmont, 7/1935. PRO Kew ED109/6011.

try to attain a knowledge which will be useful abroad, as well as for the purpose of examination."<sup>176</sup> Pinewood used gramophone records from Linguaphone but others employed a genuine French person for the purpose.

"We were taught by a Frenchman, M Junot, who lived nearby. He could not keep order in the class, but could only cry above the confusion "Please! I want to be your friend!"<sup>177</sup>

"There was this rather glamorous visiting French mistress but by golly she was as fierce as anything."<sup>178</sup>

Their duty usually included sitting at the 'French' table in the dining hall where only French could be spoken. This has been described variously as "an embarrassing site"<sup>179</sup> and "[this table was] therefore rather a quiet one."<sup>180</sup> Cottesmore attempted a French play and Hillstone had a visiting French lecturer "who will talk (in slow and simple French) about Joan of Arc. Vocabularies of all the words to be used will be issued early in the term, and only those who know all the words will be allowed to come to the lecture, which will be illustrated by slides."<sup>181</sup>

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176 Beachborough Park prospectus, 1930s. School archives.

177 Mr.A.L.P.Carter (Arnold House, Llandulas), letter dd.2/1993.

178 Jewell; Op.Cit.

179 Memoirs in Fernden Society archive.

180 Carter; Op.Cit.

181 Carmen Strigis (Hillstone magazine), Summer 1923; p4.